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# CONTEMPORARY FRENCH DRAMATISTS

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Porto-Riche, Hervieu, Lavedan, Donnay,  
Rostand, Lemaître, Capus, Bataille,  
Bernstein, and Flers and  
Caillavet

BY

BARRETT H. CLARK

Author of "The Continental Drama of Today," "The  
British and American Drama of Today,"  
Translator and Editor "Four  
Plays of the Free  
Theater,"  
etc.



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The studies on Lavedan, Lemaître, and Donnay, are reprinted in revised form, from my *Three Modern Plays from the French*; that on Hervieu from the translation of *The Labyrinth*; certain sections on the Théâtre Libre from my *Four Plays of the Free Theater*. To Messrs. Henry Holt, B. W. Huebsch and Stewart & Kidd, I acknowledge my indebtedness for their courteous permission to reprint this matter.



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## CHARACTERISTICS

IN this little collection of studies I have tried rather to afford the reader some insight into the works of a number of the more important representative French dramatists of the past twenty-five years, and trace in an informal manner some of the chief characteristics of these writers, than to compile a historical study of the contemporary Parisian stage. As practically every dramatist to whom I have devoted a chapter is still putting forth plays, and many of them are well under fifty, such an attempt would lack finality. Twenty years hence that compendium can be written.

Since Professor Brander Matthews' illuminating study on the French dramatists nothing has appeared treating the average playwright who typifies the essential French spirit of the day. Professor Matthews' book ended at about the point where this begins.

For a number of reasons it has been thought advisable to omit a consideration of Maeterlinck from this volume: to begin with, he is not typically French: his Belgian origin, his ideas, his plays which are foreign to what the average Frenchman knows and recognizes, do not admit him to the ranks of the French dramatists. He is a world-figure because he is a world-thinker;

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Rostand, too, is a world-figure, but only because he has lifted what is most French in the nation into a high realm of art. There are, besides, some six or seven entire volumes devoted to the study and analysis of Maeterlinck. For these reasons he does not find a place in the present collection. Those dramatists whom I have included are the ones who have stood, during the past quarter century or more, for the drama of the day, and, with the single exception of Rostand, constitute the average, but an average, as I shall try to indicate, which is of the highest excellence.

I have not of course mentioned or taken up all the dramatists of distinction or merit; I have merely touched upon many of those, for instance, whose connection with the Théâtre Libre entitled them to a position of honor as being historically important. I have spent little time on men of letters, as such—like Paul Bourget and Jean Richepin—who have turned to the theater rather as an avocation, with greater or less success; I have allowed others, like Pierre Wolff, Romain Coolus, Georges Courteline, Emile Fabre, Tristan Bernard, Abel Hermant, Jules Renard, Pierre Veber, Maurice Hennequin, Lucien Descaves and Albert Guinon, to give way before those of greater renown and originality. Some of the younger writers, Paul Claudel, Marie Lenéru, Henry Kistemaekers, and Sacha Guitry, possess characteristics which place them apart and leave them beyond the pale of a book of this sort. It may be that I have failed to do justice to some of these. But the well-established dramatists, however, to whom separate papers are devoted,

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represent the principal tendencies of the French stage of recent years.

With the exception of Rostand and Brieux, and perhaps Henry Bernstein, none of the dramatists here treated is well known in the United States. Rostand is, of course, world-famous because of *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Chantecler*; Brieux first attracted notice because of the rather inordinate praise which Bernard Shaw heaped upon him, while Bernstein is known to us only through four or five poor adaptations of his most popular plays.<sup>1</sup> Hervieu, Donnay, Bataille, Lavedan, Flers and Caillavet, have each, through the medium of some sort of adaptation, made their way for short runs to our stage, but they are no more than names to the average playgoer. In book-form, the modern French drama is all but inaccessible to the English reader: scarcely twenty plays — of Brieux, Hervieu, Capus, Porto-Riche, Lavedan, Donnay, Lemaître, and Curel — are available in English.

That we do not know the modern French drama is due partly to the fact that it is so essentially "French" that its subject matter is totally foreign and therefore distasteful to us. Although we have accepted the frank and sincere treatment of sex by a social worker like Brieux, we have not so far been able to adopt the French point of view — or rather the European point of view — and consider sex plays as works of art. We may take pride in the fact that we will not appreciate the beauties of Bataille's *La Femme nue*, or Porto-

<sup>1</sup> A translation of *The Thief* has just appeared (*Drama League Series*).

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Riche's *Amoureuse* or Donnay's *Amants*, and we may very possibly be right in asserting that the French nation places far too great emphasis on sex, but we cannot as students of the drama close our eyes to facts or to a whole art which is based upon a principle with which we heartily disagree. We should at least have an opportunity of studying serious plays some of which have been accepted by critics and audiences as masterpieces which will live by reason of their essential truth and their literary style, as well as their subject matter. If the French nation is producing such plays, it is a duty at least to consider them, and not quarrel with the dramatists who for the most part have done their best to paint the life of their time as they saw it.

In gathering my material I have often had occasion to speak with some of the authors on this particular point. Scarcely one of them could understand the attitude of the average Anglo-Saxon. When I asked Maurice Donnay which play he would prefer to have translated as a typical example of his work, he replied at once: "*Amants*." I said that the play would not be accepted on the stage, and I expressed a doubt as to whether in book form it would be read in the sympathetic mood it was intended to arouse, and told him that it ran the risk of being criticised on the ground of its immorality. "Why?" he enquired. I then attempted to explain our attitude toward sex plays and told him that we demanded for the most part atonement in our plays and our literature for violation of the conventions surrounding sex-relationship. Donnay very willingly averred that he

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could not quarrel with that attitude, but what did it have to do with the case in question? He tried to prove nothing in *Amants*; he merely wrote what he saw and felt! On another occasion I asked François de Curel why most of his plays were caviar to the French public, and he said that with the exception of his latest play, *La Danse devant le Miroir*, sex played but a minor part in his works. He then added: "The French dramatists treat of love because it is the only subject which every member of the audience understands, and a dramatist must of course appeal to the masses." I then asked why practically *all* the dramatists kept insisting on the old theme, the triangle, and he repeated what he had said before — and shrugged his shoulders.

If the drama be a representation of life, we must conclude that the French nation — in Paris, at least, for there is no drama outside the capital — is prone to lay too much stress on sex. But if this is a fact, we obviously cannot find fault with the dramatists. We may, if we are so inclined, criticise the French people, but we must at least admit that they are frank. There is not so great a difference between nations that simply because as a people we either fear or bring frank sex treatment to our stage, or are unable to produce dramatists able to do so, are therefore blameless. We must argue rather that the Frenchman is braver and more of an artist than the American or the Englishman. If our American drama is to reflect American life, we must be sincere. There are women in America like Porto-Riche's *Amoureuse*, but we have not as yet dared to place them on the



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stage; it is not Puritanism which prevents our so doing, but fear of looking facts in the face — and the want of a Porto-Riche. “Free-love” unions exist in our land, and the partners are not always punished. Donnay told the truth, which was not after all so unpleasant, but we have no writer as yet who would or could write an American *Amants*.

Still, the everlasting husband, wife, and lover, is tiresome. If sex is *one* of the greatest elements and motive-forces in life, it is not the only one. Even the French have recognized this, and occasional plays — Brieux's *L'Engrenage* and *La Robe rouge*, Curel's *Le Repas du lion*, Rostand's *Cyrano*, Bourget's *La Barricade*, and Fabre's *Les Ventres dorés* — break the monotony. But the fact remains that they have no Galsworthy, no Granville Barker, no Bernard Shaw. Their essential provinciality, exclusiveness, snobbery possibly, have prevented their branching out. For a time Antoine forced the Parisian public to a knowledge of Ibsen and Björnson and Hauptmann and Tolstoy; during the past twenty years Lugué-Poé and his Théâtre de l'Oeuvre have presented foreign works from time to time, but the French public will have its own plays depicting its own little round of life.

There are few contrasts more striking than that between Paris and Berlin as theater centers. Something over a hundred new plays are produced annually in each city; Paris counts but ten or twelve new plays by foreign authors, Berlin not many more by native writers. Paris knows practically nothing of Pinero and Jones and Barker and Galsworthy, and misunderstands Shaw with unflinching

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regularity, whenever the proverbially small band of enthusiasts is fortunate enough to organize a production of his simplest plays. During the season of 1914 two or three plays of Galsworthy were produced in a number of German theaters, and three translations issued in book form; Shaw's *Pygmalion* was produced and printed nearly a year before it was seen in London; *Mrs. Warren's Profession* ran at a People's Theater in Berlin during the greater part of the winter, while ten or twelve of Shaw's plays made their appearance regularly in some twenty cities of the Empire. The past season in Berlin counts among its productions of foreign plays, some of the best works of Shakespeare, Wilde, Strindberg, Björnson, Ibsen, Tolstoy, Gorky, Brieux, Flers and Caillavet, Tristan Bernard, Synge, Hamsun, Paileron, and Croisset. In Paris the season was an unusual one, for Lugné-Poé afforded his audience their first opportunity of seeing the *Playboy of the Western World*, and achieved the extraordinary feat of making a success of Carl Rössler's *Five Frankfurters*. An adaptation of a play by Paul Lindau had a successful run at the Théâtre Antoine, while Bahr's *Das Konzert* failed at the Réjane. That very nearly completes the list of foreign plays for Paris. The Frenchman's ignorance of foreign drama might be urged as an excuse for his own narrowness, but as a rule he is willfully ignorant.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M. Adolphe Brisson (in *Le Théâtre*, 1912) said: "The other countries — except perhaps in its own narrow way, Belgium — drag out a languishing and poverty-stricken existence. Ibsen and Björnson are no more. Gerhart Hauptmann is written out. Bernard Shaw is scattering. Read the articles of the

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The French attitude seems to be: We have good dramatists of our own; why therefore seek to know of those of other countries, most of whom have doubtless learned their technic from Scribe and Augier? This may be well for France as a nation, and the Germans on their part may be forced to look abroad for lack of native talent, but the French suffer because they choose to isolate themselves, theatrically.

As a rule, then, we shall find the French dramatist somewhat narrow both in subject-matter and treatment, but on the other hand, we shall observe an intensification, a power of concentrating upon character, and a technical facility of the highest order. From the generalities of Scribe they have come to particularize and have given us full-length portraits which are contributions to literature and the drama. Each phase of daily life we find pictured in detail with striking verisimilitude. Capus draws the little merchant, the boulevardier, the cocotte, with an unerring hand; Lavedan paints the aristocrat, contrasting him with the parvenu bourgeois; Porto-Riche, Bataille, and Donnay, the lovers; Bernstein sums up in tensely dramatic situations the tremendous forces at

foreign critics; they speak only of disappointed hopes, regrets. . . . 'We have in London,' says Mr. Walkley, 'a number of clever purveyors, but no great dramatist.' M. Delines describes the emptiness of the Russian stage, which is reduced to seeking its pleasure in the old-fashioned works of Turgenev and Tolstoy. Austria's sole contribution is one play, *Faith and Fireside*, written by a newcomer, Schönherr. M. Prater assures us, even, that in this piece 'cleverness takes the place of talent.' In Hungary, M. Melchior Lengyel produced his *Typhoon* . . . the only interesting play of the season. In the United States absolute barrenness of literary works. . . ."

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work in modern society. Hervieu is largely interested in the more abstract questions concerning mankind; he maintains a distant attitude and judges his fellow-creatures in well-patterned thesis plays; Brioux, more warm-blooded, batters the prejudices of the day and attacks the institutions of men on the one hand, and draws memorable pictures of the peasantry and the bourgeoisie, on the other. Curel stands apart, coldly dissecting the abnormalities of modern victims of society.

With few exceptions — and these are to be found among the works of Curel and Brioux — the plays of these men are all variations of the *pièce bien faite*; the average excellence of construction becomes tiresome in the long run. We long for a little of Frank Wedekind's brutality, Hauptmann's negligence, Andreyev's intentional crudity. We weary of "good writing." Perhaps if the Academy were not so often uppermost in the mind of the French dramatists, and its coveted portals not so readily accessible to the dramatic brotherhood, France would have a more vigorous drama.

If the plays of Henry Becque and if André Antoine's epoch-making Théâtre Libre ushered in a new dramatic movement, influencing most of the dramatists of modern France and led them to observe life more carefully than it had been hitherto observed, if Antoine revolutionized the art of acting, he was still unable to kill the so-called Romantic drama — an end, which he himself has declared, he never desired.

In 1898 the French critic Augustin Filon in his book, *De Dumas à Rostand* — translated as *The*

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*Modern French Drama* — hailed the dawn of a new era and wrote enthusiastically of the Revival of Verse on the Stage. He said: "But the crowning fact to which I have striven to give prominence in this my last study, is the revival of verse on the stage. And it is not only dramatic verse which is now flourishing in several theaters, lyrical verse has its share in this revival, and appropriates one evening a week at the Odéon. At the Bodinière it is quite at home, and although much that is impure mingles with the poetry in the amusement provided at the famous Butte, it must be recognized that poetry holds the first place there, and has become indispensable. A quarter of a century ago, it would have been simply ignored, but from an outcast it has become a queen." William L. Courtney, in his introduction to M. Filon's volume, writes: "We have got now to the latest phase of French dramatic art, which is nothing more nor less than a real romantic revival." The moment seemed an auspicious one: Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* and Jean Richepin's *Le Chemineau* had just appeared, and it did seem that authors and public, turning from the Antoine school, had found in Romance a new channel. But the "revival" was only momentary. To-day, in spite of poetic plays by such writers as André Rivoire, Paul Claudel, René Fauchois, Gabriel Trarieux, Albert Poizat and two or three others, the tendency in drama is realistic. Rostand, since *Cyrano*, has written but one romantic play — *L'Aiglon*. *Chantecler* is modern in spirit. Richepin, in spite of *Par le Glaive* and *Don Quichotte*, has done nothing comparable with



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*Le Chemineau*, while his latest play was an unsuccessful trifle: *Le Tango!* Miguel Zamacoïs, in *Les Bouffons* and *La Fleur merveilleuse*, has indubitably contributed charming poetic romances, but he is a pleasing exception. Jean Aicard's romantic verse-plays are not popular, and *Le Père Lebonnard*, his best known, is a modern work in which verse happened to be employed as a medium.

France continues in the line of her traditions. If for a time Naturalism broke out, in its most violent adherents — like Jean Jullien, Georges Ancey, and Emile Zola — it was only for a short time, and the early Théâtre Libre writers, like Brieux, have since the first aggressive days, settled down and established a sane equilibrium. The Capus', Donnays, Lavedans, and Pierre Wolffs, are lineal descendants of Scribe and Dumas fils and Augier. The French drama seems doomed to be the drama of tradition; this is at once its virtue and its defect. As a result of inbreeding it may occasionally fall into corruption, but by reason of specialization a well-balanced, highly-finished medium of expression emerges. This is France's contribution. If we demand novelty, an infusion of new blood, we must wait for a revolutionary genius, another Molière.



## THE THEATRE LIBRE

ANDRÉ ANTOINE is now past his prime, though he continues with indefatigable zeal one of the most difficult of tasks: that of directing the Odéon Theater. Almost any day a large, strongly-built, stoop-shouldered man, his eyes fixed steadfastly on the ground, may be seen in the vicinity of the Odéon. His face, every feature of it, gives evidence of a crude, almost brutal, forcefulness; it is at the same time the honest open face of the bourgeois, with an added air of inexorable determination. Once a *révolté* at the head of a small band of co-workers, he is now the respectable and rather conservative manager of one of the state subsidized theaters.<sup>1</sup>

March 30th, 1887, is a memorable date. On that evening a group of amateurs, under the direction of an employee of the Gas Company on a salary of three hundred and fifty dollars a year, presented four new and original one-act plays upon a little stage improvised in a hall situated in the inconspicuous and high-sounding Passage de l'Elysée des Beaux-Arts, not far from where the notorious Moulin-Rouge now stands. The ex-

<sup>1</sup> Since the above was written, Antoine has been forced to resign his position as director of the Odéon. As he was threatened with bankruptcy because of certain unwise ventures from a business point of view, his friends organized a benefit for him, allowing him to leave for Constantinople, where he now directs a theater.

penses for that performance were defrayed almost entirely by the young Antoine, who had arranged that the production should coincide with his pay-day, the 30th of the month. The upshot of it all was that one of the little pieces was immediately accepted at the Odéon, and — what was of far greater import — a new movement was started. The experiment received some notice, but practically no financial foundation. The first performance had exhausted the meager resources of the young director, and it appeared as if the theater would fail through lack of funds. He managed to collect enough money to risk one more performance, however, and on the next convenient pay-day — May 30th — made a second attempt, giving on this occasion Emile Bergerat's *La Nuit bergamesque* and Oscar Méténier's *En Famille* — one verse and one prose play. This latter performance drew to it among other well-known literary men, Alphonse Daudet, Francisque Sarcey, and Emile Zola. Antoine was encouraged now to proceed and carry out the ideas he was at the time beginning to formulate. He accordingly resigned his position at the Gas Company, and devoted his time and energy to getting subscriptions for the fall season. We are told that in order to economize he carried invitations to subscribers by hand, thereby saving considerable postage.

The season opened on October 12th, with two plays, *L'Evasion* — in one act — by Villiers de l'Isle Adam, and *Soeur Philomène*, a dramatization of the novel of the same name by the Goncourts. By the end of the year seventeen plays had been produced, among them Tolstoy's *The Power*

of *Darkness*, Jullien's *La Sérénade*, Hennique's *Esther Brandès* — all for the first time in France. Again Antoine's success left him nearly bankrupt, but he set about getting subscribers once more, and by the end of his second season he had taken in more than forty thousand francs. Together with material success came encouragement, from the public, the critics, the press in general; the company, now receiving salaries, was able to devote all its time to acting. The Théâtre Libre moved into a larger house, and assumed a position of importance in the French playgoing world of the day.

Antoine founded his theater with the idea of inducing new and original dramatists to produce works which the prejudice of managers and public otherwise afforded no opportunity of producing. The French stage of the day was so conventional that only plays written according to accepted standards would attract audiences. At least this is what the managers thought — and the result was the same. Together with conventional plays went conventional acting and conventional stage-setting.

Antoine felt that all this was wrong, and he did his best to set it right. Adolphe Thalasso briefly sums up the "esthétique" of the new venture in his book on *Le Théâtre Libre*: "Plays in which life supplies movement begin to take the place of those in which movement supplies life. Complicated plots give way to simple stories; the play of intrigue is offset by the study of reality; characters become natural, classic; the tragic and comic are no longer mingled: the genres have become distinct. Interminable, vagarious plays give way to

short, concise, rapid ones. The tirade disappears; bombast and bathos are relegated to the background. . . . no more 'raisonneurs' . . . facts alone explain the philosophy of the piece. The eternally sympathetic and benevolent character is likewise driven out. The authors go to the very sources of life for the morality of their plays. So much the worse for morality if their 'moral' is immoral! Such is life — and the theater should be not an amusement, but an image of life. Technical gymnastics are thrown aside: the human heart needs more than the tricks of the trade in order to be explained. The theater of to-day must be a revolt against that of yesterday. As in all revolutions, there is a good deal of exaggeration, for the new methods are driven home with hammering blows. To attain the desired end, the revolutionists overstep the bounds, and in striking down the guilty, the innocent are not spared."

This at least is a statement of the ideals of the theater, which were, needless to say, not always lived up to; the long traditions of French drama could not so easily be thrown to the winds. Often even in the most iconoclastic of the Théâtre Libre plays, we are conscious of the influence of Scribe and Sardou, and occasionally the technique of the *pièce bien faite* is the only redeeming feature of these plays. Yet this point should not be too strongly urged, for there was ever a conscious effort to throw off what was bad and conventional in the past, and seek new roads, new means of expression fitted to subjects which had hitherto but rarely found a place in the theater.

Antoine's new methods of acting and manag-

ing, his contribution to what is now spoken of as the art of the theater, do not properly belong in the present discussion, which is confined to outlining the beginnings of the modern movement in France. It may be said in passing that he did much to modify the Conservatoire style of acting, and that to-day at the Comédie Française many of his "reforms"—the actor's turning his back to the audience while speaking, for instance—are accepted without a murmur. Very shortly after the foundation of the Théâtre Libre, Antoine had some difficulty in holding his company together, so great was the demand for new-style actors at such old and well-established theaters as the Renaissance, the Porte Saint-Martin, and the Gymnase. To-day many of the little band of amateurs are among the best-known actors of the French stage.

It is of course impossible to say whether the extraordinarily large number of dramatists who had an opportunity of offering their first works under Antoine would otherwise have entered the field of the drama; it is probable that such born men of the theater as Lavedan, Porto-Riche, and Pierre Wolff, would sooner or later have made their way to the popular theaters. But whether Brieux, Jullien, Hennique, Ancy, and above all Curel would have used the drama as a medium is more open to doubt. Of these, Jullien, Ancy, and Hennique, have been successful only under the Antoine régime; while they did much for the movement in its day, they were later unable to adapt themselves to such modifications as were necessary to meet with popular approval, and



ceased writing for the theater. Brioux, assimilating what was best in the new methods, made it his own, and continued to modify it, combining his innate sense of the theater with what he had learned from Antoine. Together with Curel, who has less than Brioux modified his methods, he is the most original thinker of the French stage of to-day. Curel, like Hennique and Ancy and Jullien, was never a popular writer, has nevertheless continued to produce his plays and maintain his position apart and hold it with honor.

Antoine discovered Brioux and Curel. When Brioux was a poor obscure editor in Rouen he sent to Antoine the manuscript of his first important play, *Ménages d'artistes*. This bourgeois study, with one or two strong scenes and a great deal of good "milieu" painting, attracted the young manager who produced the same author's second play, *Blanchette*, a play which has held the stage to this day. In the paper on Curel I have related how that writer sent Antoine the manuscripts of three of his plays, under three separate names, and how the manager accepted all three.

Porto-Riche was another for whose plays Antoine literally forced an audience. In producing *La Chance de Françoise* he opened the way for *Amoureuse*. Courteline, too, that ingenious comic writer, received his first encouragement at the Théâtre Libre. Would *Boubouroche* otherwise have seen the light? Emile Fabre, the virile author of *L'Argent* and *Les Ventres dorés*, has furnished the stage with plays of society and finance, which still hold the stage. Paul Ginisty, Pierre Wolff, and Albert Guinon are among the numerous



others who received their first impetus under Antoine.

No one man can turn the tide in so great and important a movement as that in which Antoine labored. A few years before the founding of his theater, Henry Becque, the father of stage Naturalism in France, produced two plays, *La Parisienne* and *Les Corbeaux*, which went far to influence the new writers. The *Comédie rosse*, of which *La Parisienne* is the typical instance, became de rigueur, while *Les Corbeaux* was accepted as the "Bible of the Naturalists." Becque and Antoine, then, with their associates and followers, gave Naturalism a chance in the theater, and accomplished at least a revolution in the taste of the public. If that taste has since become modified, it was but a wholesome reaction against what was most violent and transitory in the new movement. The good remains — in Brioux and Curel and Porto-Riche and Fabre — the bad has already died a natural death.

Not long ago Curel had occasion to render homage to Antoine in the following words: "I believe that the greatest service rendered by the Théâtre Libre was that of liberating the modern French stage from all schools and literary coteries. A day will come when greater justice will be done our dramatic era, when the full extent of its originality and independence will be fully realized. The originality and independence of which I speak are due for the most part to the Théâtre Libre." Brioux lately wrote as follows: "He [Antoine] it was who discovered for the public a great number of authors whose works had never been pre-

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sented, certain among whom would never have had a chance of production without his aid. He introduced Ibsen for the first time to the French nation, and François de Curel to the public at large. Antoine created a taste for *mise en scène* which was more artistic, and did not constitute an insult to the spectator. . . . He reduced the number of scenic conventions, he encouraged new authors by affording them success, and aroused in the hearts and minds of the masses the power to understand and feel in the presence of noble dramatic works. It is not his fault if the public is nowadays but rarely given the occasion to satisfy that appetite for better things which he went so far to train, and which now seems about to disappear for lack of proper nourishment."

## FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

VISCOUNT FRANÇOIS DE CUREL is the only dramatist considered in the present collection for whom playwriting is an avocation. His large fortune, extensive business and, above all, his keen interest in hunting, occupy the greater portion of his time. His ten plays cover a period of more than twenty years; the first eight were produced between 1892 and 1900, the ninth in 1906, the latest in 1914. Curel writes then to please himself, and if his efforts be judged according to the criterion of popular approval, he has not often pleased the public. As he himself once said, he was ideally situated to wait for ideas and the necessary impetus and inspiration to develop them. He has never been a "man of the theater," he was never forced to write down to his public. Following his own inclinations, and writing only when writing came naturally and easily, his work bears the imprint of great care both as to style and content. Abnormal cases in the psychology of crime, heredity, sex pathology, character analysis of the subtlest and most evasive sort, are what fill his strange plays. There is never any conscious effort to please or popularize, so that it is not difficult to see the reason of the failure of nearly every work. The love element, pure and simple, so cherished

by all audiences, especially the French, is never introduced per se: he may at times tell a love story, but it is stripped of its romance, perhaps even of its legitimate appeal. This continual insistence upon the abnormal in human nature doubtless tells against Curel as a commentator on human nature in general, but we may always be sure to find in his works a sincere, masterly, and complete treatment of whatever strange corner or unfrequented byway of science the dramatist chooses to consider.

In the Rue de Grenelle, one of the old streets of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, stands the ancestral mansion of the de Curels. Under the high gate and through a spacious court-yard I made my way one afternoon, up to one of the huge wings set apart for the use of Monsieur de Curel on the occasion of his rare visits to Paris. A short, thick-set, ruddy-complexioned, black-bearded man greeted me with a merry smile and cordial handshake. He looked like a brownie. I had imagined the author of *Les Fossiles* as a severely demeanored aristocrat, serious, even cold in manner, but to be met by a jolly, almost hilarious little fellow was something of a surprise. He almost bounced into his library, and there put me into a large comfortable arm-chair before the fire. He then proceeded to balance himself on the arm of another chair.

“I must apologize,” he said, “for not knowing a word of English. It’s quite inexcusable, for I have English blood in my veins!”

To every question he gave willing and concise answer, but I suspected that “the Drama” was not one of his hobbies. Just what his pet hobby

was I was not long in learning. The moment there was a lull in the conversation he asked me to excuse him a moment. "I have something that may interest you!" While he was gone, I had occasion to remark the many pictures that hung on the walls of the library and hall, and noted examples of Monet, Manet, Cazin, and Millet. Was this man, too, an art collector? His strident voice called me into another room, where he bade me be seated at a table, upon which he spread some forty or fifty snap-shots. Beaming with pride, he asked me whether I liked hunting, and then proceeded to explain each of the pictures: François de Curel with a rifle slung over his back and a boar or deer at his feet, was the subject of most of these. Then there was François de Curel with two foresters, François de Curel in front of one of his hunting-lodges on his estate in Lorraine: François de Curel as hunter was evidently more attractive to him than François de Curel as a dramatist. "I love the country," he exclaimed, "it is my home. I come to Paris only to superintend the production of a play or on other business. In Lorraine I look after my affairs, my factory, and my estate. Meantime I hunt — I write occasionally. You see, I'm a bachelor, and I spend the long winter nights, sitting in front of a huge fire, with my dogs curled up about me, and read. I don't think I'm to be pitied, now, do you?" Again he laughed that genial laugh, and the author of *L'Envers d'une sainte* was less himself than ever.

François de Curel was born at Metz in 1854. He was a precocious and avid reader; in his *Ré-*

*ponse à l'enquête de M. Binet* he says: "In my early youth, almost at the time I began to read, I felt that the writing of books was an enviable and honorable profession, the greatest of professions." He says elsewhere — in an interview — "At the age of five I read all the *Robinsons* I could get hold of: *Crusoe*, *Swiss Family*, etc. I devoured them and pondered upon them." Not long after, he "devoured" the classics and from time to time made modest attempts at original production, told and even wrote little stories for the amusement of his comrades. His scientific studies — the family wished him to become an engineer — for some time prevented his following the literary profession. He did however try his hand at fiction and at the age of thirty-one published his first novel, *L'Été des fruits secs*, which was followed by *Le Sauvetage du Grand duc*, four years later. In this novel François de Curel gave promise of considerable talent for the theater, so that the critic Charles Maurras wrote in exhortation: "Au théâtre! Au théâtre, M. de Curel!"

One of Curel's biographers — Roger Le Brun — recounts the following incident, and aptly remarks that it indicated in no uncertain manner the "dramatic vocation of the author." "A happy opening to his career awaited Curel at the very outset. Weary of calling on the various theatrical directors, after having suffered humiliations as a result of his attempts to gain the good will of the high officials appointed by the government to manage the Théâtre Français and the Odéon, he thought of Antoine who at that time



(1891) had recently founded the Théâtre Libre. Simultaneously, Curel sent to the young director, three manuscripts, under three different names: *L'Amour brode*, *L'Envers d'une sainte*, and *La Figurante*. As soon as he had read the plays, he wrote complimenting the three authors — and immediately produced *L'Envers d'une sainte!* ”

This play is typical of the author's methods and choice of theme. Its origin was a paragraph among the “faits divers” of one of the daily papers, which ran somewhat as follows: “A woman was once arrested on a charge of murder. Great influence was brought to bear in the case, the court and the public were made to believe in her innocence; she was defended on the ground of insanity. The supposed maniac was thereupon sent to an asylum, where she remained for a number of years. One day she contrived to escape, and went at once to her family.” From this simple incident Curel took the broad outlines, and made a psychological study of penetrating depth. Julie had, nearly nineteen years before the play opens, attempted to kill the young wife of the man she loved (by pushing her into a ravine); the injured woman, understanding Julie's attitude when she committed the deed, does not divulge the secret, and allows those concerned to believe that her “fall” was accidental. Julie then goes into a convent. The man for whose sake she attempted the murder, she learns one day, is dead. There is nothing now in the way of her returning to her mother and sister. This she does. At this point the play opens. Curel is interested and chiefly concerned in a close analysis of Julie's attitude of



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mind. Her jealousy of Jeanne, the wife who has meantime told her husband of Julie's crime, Julie's evil influence on Christine, Jeanne's daughter, and her eventual return to the convent, are the bare materials with which Curel constructs his play. The struggle between one individual and another, the purely intellectual duel between two women for the *memory* of a man both had loved, the austerity of the dialogue, the whole atmosphere of impending doom, are reminiscent of Strindberg and Ibsen. And yet the young author in his first play was in no sense an imitator: he had simply, without perhaps being aware, assimilated their method of treatment. The play is further remarkable in that it is a play in which the characters are women. I should mention the unimportant Georges, Christine's fiancé, but he is purely accessory, and M. de Curel once told me that when he re-writes the play he will omit the man.

Curel's preoccupation with the abnormal is seen in all his plays. He seeks out the strange occurrences in life, shapes the facts into a simple story, and then proceeds to analyze motives. Situations are for him only excuses for soul and mind analysis, otherwise his stories would be merely skillfully-contrived melodramas. *L'Invitée*, the third of the plays in order of production, is little other than a variation on the theme of the first.

*Les Fossiles* — the second play — is something of a departure. Like Henri Lavedan's *Le Prince d'Aurec*, it is concerned with the French aristocracy of the day, only it is a family tragedy, not a satirical comedy. Curel, himself a noble, knows well his class and, while judging its ideals, its aspira-

tions, its splendid snobbery and true nobility of heart, is sufficiently detached as an artist to realize the pathos of the situation. Since the founding of France's latest Republic the nobility has been placed in a difficult position: with no offices to fill under an administration whose principles it cannot accept, looked down upon as a class by the Republicans, it can only hold high its head and strive to preserve its traditions. Curel takes an old family, the de Chantemelle, assumed to be famous in the annals of the history of France, and places them in a dilemma whence only a crime can save them. Robert de Chantemelle, the young heir, learns that he has but a few months to live. As he is about to leave for the South, he confides to his mother that he has a son, by his mistress, who was until recently a protégée of his mother. The Duke, Robert's father, is informed of this fact, but out of consideration for Robert and more especially because he sees a way of perpetuating the family line, he does not tell Robert the truth of the matter: that Hélène has been his own mistress as well, and that the child in question is his own son, not Robert's. The family then decides to adopt the infant, and legitimize him by allowing Robert to marry Hélène. This he does, but trouble immediately arises from the fact that Hélène, fearful lest the family should estrange her from her son, begs to be allowed to take the child with her after Robert's death, which is imminent. She wishes to educate him in her own way. This precipitates the tragedy, for the future Duke de Chantemelle must be educated as such. The Duke then reveals the truth to Robert, declaring

that one of them must die. As Robert's days are numbered, that one will be Robert. Exposure in a cold climate means sure death to him, so that when he leaves for the family estate in the Ardennes, his fate is sealed. The last act takes place at Robert's coffin, just before the interment. Robert's will, which contains his last wishes for the education of the heir, contains the essence of what the "fossil" nobility has to say of its dying hopes:

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost I, Robert Charles-Henri de Chantemelle, about to appear before God, ask forgiveness of my family for all the evil I have done them, and solemnly swear that I bear in my heart not the slightest trace of resentment toward any member of it. I wish my father to know that I perfectly understood and sympathized with his great grief at seeing our race about to disappear. He forgot that he was a father only to remember that he was a Duke. *He* was able to lay aside the most sacred of personal feelings; *I* had the strength to stifle within me the desire for vengeance. And what vengeance! I thank my God for taking my life as soon as possible. *That*, I hope, is the seal of my forgiveness.

"When I am dead, I wish the following things to be done:

" . . . Claire [his sister] need have no regrets in my regard. Only when she realized that I could not live did she recognize how great were her responsibilities. How ready she is to expiate her well-intentioned crime, committed because she was too jealous of the glory of our family!

"I should be inconsiderate if I myself recorded

what she has promised to do. I leave to her the task of explaining in what way and to how great an extent she means to devote herself. Claire will represent me among you. I place Hélène and the child in her care. Whatever she asks, it is I who command it.

“ I ask my parents to give to Hélène the Château des Ecluses in Normandy. She has promised me to go there and consecrate her life to the education of her son. If she ever allows herself to depart in the least detail from this end, she may be considered to have perjured herself. The oath she made to me I had a right to demand in return for my forgiveness.

“ As soon as Henri shall have arrived at the age of fifteen, I authorize Hélène to take him to Paris in order that he may enjoy the educational advantages which can be found only in that city. The future Duke de Chantemelle must be educated with the idea that his rank is not an excuse to dispense with personal merit. Let nothing be neglected in making him a modern man, in the deepest significance of the term. Let him be in sympathy with his own generation, and understand its glory. In prolonging our hatred, we are courting disaster; our feuds were legitimate of course when the blood was still warm which had been shed in the Revolution; but these feuds now only indicate a degenerate tendency and selfish egotism. The Revolution guillotined our grandparents who were at first so warmly partisan of her cause, but that is no reason why we should make of that a pretext in order to be hostile to the social betterment of our time. Let us remain true to our tradi-

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tions in sacrificing our lives by generous errors, thereby establishing it as a fact that the nobility is a school of disinterestedness, pointing out the way to the generation, daring of thought, fearless of heart. . . . It seems to me that the day of the aristocracy is past; it has been recruited too much from the moneyed classes, too little on the basis of true merit. It has ever been closed to the great men who have sprung from the people, and the people have reciprocated. Before it finally disappears, it must give, by means of a pious lie, the same impression given by those gigantic fossils which turn our minds back to prehistoric antiquity.

“Later, when the heir to our name is grown to manhood, I demand that Claire tell him the manner of my death, and how his grandparents, his aunt, and his mother have sacrificed themselves, in order that he, now a tiny helpless infant, might preserve in honor the family name. He will understand that this name, transmitted by means of a terrible crime, should be borne with superhuman dignity. Let Claire repeat to him the words she spoke to me not many days ago: ‘Our existence ends with yours, but what of it? The field has been searched in order that one little flower may survive!’”

*Les Fossiles* is more human, more balanced, more “popular,” than any other Curel play; there is not so much of the purely abstract as in *L'Envers d'une sainte* and *La Danse devant le Miroir*, and a good deal more action, contrast, color. It is a picture of human beings as well as an analysis of human motives. Depicting as it does the trag-

edy of a race, the agonies of a dying pride, the struggle between ancestral feeling and personal love and inclination, it is one of the noblest works of our time.

Curel's attempts at comedy have been unsuccessful. *L'Amour brode* and *La Figurante* are marred by preciosity of style and uncertainty of purpose. The author seems to be wrestling with new ideas. The next important play, however, shows in no uncertain manner that he was once more master of his material. Up to the year 1897, he had been concerned largely with questions relating to those problems which torture the individual and render troublous the relation of one human being to another. In *Le Repas du lion*, he widens his field. He asks this question: what will a born capitalist do when his sympathies are on the side of labor, but when influences so great are brought to bear that he must fight against the side which he believes is in the right? The struggle is a most interesting one, and would have made excellent material for a play, but Curel has instead entered into a long disputation on Christian Socialism, thereby retarding the action. *Le Repas du lion* is nearly twice the length of *L'Envers d'une sainte*, and yet we are left with the impression that less is accomplished than in the earlier play. Curel the dramatist forgot that too much talk, even in a French play, will eventually ruin it. A careful selection of the significant points in the story he originally outlined would perhaps have made of *Le Repas du lion* a great play; it must, however, be accounted as one of his least successful works.



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The next play, *La Nouvelle idole*, is much better. This is another "case of conscience." A doctor, Albert Donnat, who is so bound up in his profession that he loses sight of the ultimate purpose of science, is suddenly brought to a realization of the fact that all his knowledge will not benefit humanity as effectively as the blind unquestioning faith of his little victim. Should one human being be sacrificed to scientific research in order that others may be saved? That is this doctor's dilemma. Donnat is experimenting with cancer on a young consumptive girl who is apparently without hope; suddenly she is cured, but has meanwhile been inoculated with the deadly cancer vaccine. Then comes the awful revelation. But — and here Curel the idealist steps in — both the girl and the doctor have grown spiritually and morally by the tragedy, although both are condemned to death: for the doctor himself has been inoculated. Louise, Donnat's wife, had for some time past, found her husband impossible to live with, and had determined to leave him, but she is finally reconciled. She too has learned something of the heroism of scientists and the faith of their victims.

ALBERT. I do not believe in God, but I die as if I did: that thought gives me peace. My great power comes from the fact that I am understood by that little saint who is dying at my side. I feel that there is a mysterious bond between us. Her faith is my faith. My salvation is having her take my hand and guide me toward some sort of great splendor, what, I do not know. You see, I have decided to think and act like a great man, as any brave man would. It may be illogical, but will there ever come a day when one can arrive at the heights of greatness



## FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

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merely by acting according to one's intelligence? For the time being, the intelligence has its own logic, and the spirit something that I cannot understand, but that Antoinette would be able to define in a second. . . . Yes, when the time comes for a human being to die in a different manner from that of a dog, die nobly, then we must look to the humble who adore God, to those burning hearts that love with your heroism. That is where the philosophers should learn their lessons in logic.

LOUISE. [*Falling into his arms.*] What, have you really learned something from us? Albert, then I can live with you, and enjoy that communion I have always dreamed of? Now there is no barrier between us!

ALBERT. [*Freeing himself.*] No barrier? [*Indicating the place on his chest where he has been inoculated.*] You have forgotten . . . !

And the curtain falls. Here again is true tragedy.

*La Nouvelle idole*, like the rest of its author's plays, was never very successful, although during the spring and summer of 1914 it was revived for a number of times at the Comédie Française. Curel enjoys "succès d'estime" for thirty or forty performances, but he has never had a long run. Admired, respected, almost idolized by his confrères and by the press, he must be accounted the Dramatists' Dramatist. Since *La Nouvelle idole*, Curel has written but three plays: *La Fille sauvage*, in 1902, *Le Coup d'aile*, in 1906, and *La Danse devant le miroir*, in 1914.

*La Fille sauvage* is another very curious study in abnormal psychology. A savage girl, only a trifle above the state of a female beast, has been captured in a distant kingdom of Africa. A Frenchman, who is attracted by the creature, is

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granted permission by the king to take the *fille sauvage* to France and try to raise it a few rungs in the ladder of civilization. Through six long acts we assist at the metamorphosis of the character of the young girl, who becomes at last to all appearances a cultivated and attractive young Frenchwoman, and ends by returning to Africa, broken-hearted as a result of her falling in love with her protector. The play holds the attention of the audience mainly by reason of its bizarrerie. The strange story, the mingled intellectual and emotional appeal, the suspense aroused by wondering what will happen next, constitute its chief qualities. Without doubt, Curel wished to compare the civilization of Europe with that of the savages, but he became too absorbed in the purely adventurous side of his story, and in so doing, produced a work so confusing that it fails to convince. It cannot be considered much more than a curious melodrama.

In *Le Coup d'aile* Curel wished to tell about the psychology of glory, but he made the fundamental error of associating true glory with *La Patrie*. This error, he once confessed to me, became evident when the play was first produced. He then recounted the following incident: a friend once asked of a class of young students, "What is glory?" and received the unanimous answer, "The flag and the *Patrie!*" "In *Le Coup d'aile*," continued M. de Curel, "I took the flag merely as a symbol of glory, not as the living incarnation of it, and when my hero insulted it, he became immediately unsympathetic. That was not what I wanted. Had I heard that answer from

the school children, I should not have written the play as I did." Yet, in spite of its spiritual miscarriage, the play contains a splendid portrayal in the character of the chief personage.

After *Le Coup d'aile* followed a period of nearly nine years' inactivity. When, in the fall of 1913 a new play by François de Curel was announced, with Madame Simone as the principal interpreter, it seemed as if a voice from the past were heard.

The press was practically unanimous in its praise of *La Danse devant le miroir*, when it was produced at the Nouvel-Ambigu in January, 1914. Yet once more the play enjoyed only a very short run. In many ways, this work is the most subtle and complex of all; that is doubtless the reason for its failure. The idea, expressed by Paul-Adrien Schayé, in an interview with the author, is this: "The author has wished to symbolize the solitude in which the lover finds himself before the woman he loves. He believes he sees her as she is, yet he sees only what she seeks to be for him. She has understood the ideal which he seeks in her; while she loves him passionately, and strives to resemble that ideal of his, in order to make herself more acceptable in his eyes. She casts aside her true personality, and seeks to assume that which he wants. She plays a comedy, and acts a pious lie. That is the woman's rôle. And the man thinks in the same way, because he loves her, and believes that his passion should be shared equally with his partner. He too knows what she wishes him to be, and loses no time in appearing as such; he masks himself in order to be more acceptable to

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her. So well is this all accomplished, that each of the lovers possesses only a reflection of the other's desire, an appearance, not a reality." Upon this abstraction has the author built a tense and moving play. Régine "imagines that love can be trifled with; she wishes to prove the strength of her lover's affection. She wants to know whether Paul is a hero. Will he, she asks, sacrifice even his honor for her? She allows him to believe that she has been seduced, that he ought to save her by marrying her, for she is expecting a child. But Paul has been told by a friend of Régine that this is a lie, yet he cannot resist the temptation to appear in a heroic light, so that the two lovers, wishing all the time to see one another as they really are, play a dangerous comedy, which results in a tragedy. The night of their wedding they want to clear up all the deceptions of the past. . . . Yet each is condemned to solitude: the object of one's affection remains merely a mirror which reflects one's own image, distorted and falsified. During a lucid interval, Paul sees that the only way he can leave a magnificent and worthy memory of himself is to commit suicide, and this he does." The exceedingly difficult task of making this story real was marvelously accomplished. Whether we accept or reject Curot's hypothesis, if we find it hard to believe in the characters or the situation, we cannot deny that he has done his work with the greatest skill and insight. As a technical accomplishment, nothing in recent years has been seen in France comparable with it.

The French have always been largely preoccupied with sex as subject-matter for their plays,

especially during the past quarter century. François de Curel, one of the most original and high-minded men of the time, has had the courage to seek in other fields for the material which he has turned to such noble use. If he has not been successful, it is largely because he has left to others the facile exploitation of sex for its own sake, and applied his genius to the unraveling of intellectual problems. He will stand out in the history of the period as a man of genius with the courage of his convictions.

## EUGENE BRIEUX

EUGÈNE BRIEUX — or Brieux, as he prefers to be known — won his international reputation overnight, as it were, partly as the result of the somewhat extreme praise of Bernard Shaw in the preface to the *Three Plays by Brieux*. Those particular works of the French dramatist which the Irishman chose to introduce to the English-reading public were written primarily to arouse and shock the public of the day, and are in all likelihood not those by which Brieux will be longest remembered. Shaw is a self-confessed social-worker, interested in plays and literature by reason of their social import, and it was but natural that he should be attracted to such plays as *Damaged Goods*, *The Three Daughters of M. Dupont*, and *Maternity*.

In France, however, Brieux was for a number of years referred to as the “author of *Blanchette*,” and in my opinion, if he takes rank eventually — as it seems probable he will — among the first dramatists of his generation, those works so highly lauded by Shaw will be forgotten, and *Blanchette* and its more human companions will remain true specimens of his art. *Damaged Goods* is after all of purely educative value, much of its purpose has been accomplished: it broke the “conspiracy of silence.” *Maternity* has at least served to call attention to the fundamental defect in the current French concept of motherhood. A more general



problem, and one which will be in existence longer than the problems treated in *Damaged Goods* and *Maternity* is that which serves as the basis of *Blanchette*. For centuries children, better educated than their parents, will feel the gulf separating them from those who sacrificed in order to give them the means of educating themselves. *The Red Robe*, while it attacks a definite defect in the legal system of the day, is so distinctly human, that when the defect disappears, the play will remain: the Law is destined to remain a very imperfect institution, and authority in human hands will never quite be tempered with mercy.

My first impression of Brieux, as he sat before a café in the Rue Royale, was a vivid one: a heartily robust, modest yet assertive man of middle age, ruddy, almost insolently healthy, Dressed in a common blue serge suit, wearing a "Derby" hat, smoking a cigarette, and sipping a coffee, he reminded me of an Englishman or an American, playing the rôle of a Parisian. Slightly above medium height, rather thick-set, with a fine, open, clean-shaven face, short, curly grayish hair, sparkling blue eyes, upon closer inspection he presented the appearance of a French peasant who had however lived long enough in Paris to acquire a fair amount of metropolitan "polish." Genial, communicative, at times rather satirical, he strikes one as a self-made titan, a cosmopolitan man of the world, yet withal essentially French.

Brieux is among his contemporaries one of the broadest and least prejudiced of men. It is difficult to imagine Maurice Donnay in London, there



is something almost ridiculous in the effort to picture Alfred Capus trying to acclimatize himself to Berlin, or Anatole France delivering a course of lectures in Chicago, but Brioux somehow looks as if he had traveled far and he has: in neighboring European countries as well as in the Far East, and it is far from incongruous to imagine his undertaking what he has often contemplated: an American tour. Brioux's cosmopolitanism is in his character, and the success of *Damaged Goods* in America and Germany is due to something beyond its novelty of theme.

Brioux is ready and able to discuss any number of modern "live" topics — social or literary. I have often sounded him on American and English politics and literature, and found him up-to-date, well-informed, interested.

As to his private life, Brioux is modestly silent; interviewers avid of details and anecdotes are gently sent away. "I was born," he once told me, "in 1858, but of what possible interest can that be?" It is perhaps of more interest to us than to him, yet in this place we shall have to be content with the briefest outline of a biography, pieced together from two or three monographs and a few facts gleaned from conversations.

He was born in Paris fifty-six years ago. His father was a carpenter. He attended school up to the age of fifteen, when he was forced to go to work. He was an early and ardent reader of the classics: French, German, and Latin. Latin he taught himself, by the way. Before his twentieth year he had made attempts to write plays — in verse — and in his twenty-second year he wrote

a one-act verse play on a historical subject in collaboration with Gaston Salandri, called *Bernard Palissy*. This was performed at the Théâtre Cluny. Giving up his position he turned to newspaper work, in which he remained for seven years. At Rouen he was editor of *La Nouvelliste*. "The importance of his long residence in Rouen," says P. V. Thomas, the author of a short monograph on Brieux, "can hardly be overestimated; not only did he thus escape being caught up in any of the literary fads and fancies of the boulevards, but also he was better able, in a comparatively small center, such as Rouen, to grasp life as a whole than amid the complexities of the metropolis. At Rouen he learnt as editor to face questions of public interest. Here he acquired his experience of men and affairs. The knowledge of provincial life thus acquired was to stand him in good stead. Without his sojourn in Rouen, he would never have written *L'Engrenage* or *Blanchette*." No, nor *Maternity*, nor *The Philanthropists*, nor *The Substitutes*, *The Frenchwoman*, nor *The Bourgeois in the Country*.

That a son of Paris should leave his native city and study the people of the provinces, consciously or unconsciously, was a rare blessing. Brieux was never a faddist nor a Parisian; he is French, in the sense that Emile Augier was French, and Balzac and Henry Becque, and therein lies his greatest power. He leaves to Capus and Donnay and Porto-Riche the task of painting the manners of the French capital and analyzing the Parisienne, and goes direct to the peasants,—“La France qui travaille, La France qui prie.”

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André Antoine discovered Brieux. In an earlier paper it is told how the young journalist sent the manuscript of *Ménages d'artistes* to the director of the Théâtre Libre, how, two years later, *Blanchette* was produced, and how Brieux found himself as a dramatist.

Brieux's plays have been well summed up in three or four brief studies,<sup>1</sup> so that there is little need of repeating what is so near at hand. Suffice it to remark that the total dramatic output constitutes a most valuable and interesting set of social documents, that *Blanchette* is an attack upon certain aspects of the educational system, *M. de Réboval* and *La Courvée* a protest against the *ménage à trois* and the marriage laws, *L'Engrenage* against political abuses, *Les Bienfaiteurs* against indiscriminate charity, *L'Évasion* against the abuse of science and medicine, *Les Trois filles de M. Dupont* against certain aspects of the marriage question, *Résultat des courses* against gambling in the working classes, *Le Berceau* against divorce, *La Robe rouge* against the abuse of the law and the system of promotion, *Les Remplaçantes* against the recruiting of wet-nurses, *Les Avariés* against the conspiracy of silence regarding the nature and treatment of venereal diseases. *La Petite Amie* treats of the marriage laws and the relation between parents and children again, *Maternité* and *La Déserteuse* are concerned with motherhood and marriage; *Les Hannetons* treats of "free love"; *La Française* is a vindication of

<sup>1</sup> P. V. Thomas, *Eugène Brieux, The Man and His Plays*; and prefaces to *Three Plays by Brieux*, and *Blanchette and The Escape*.

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the French woman and family; *Simone* and *Suzette* are pleas for the child of divorced parents; *La Foi* questions the validity of accepted faith in religion; *La Femme seule* is a document showing the essential economic dependence of woman in France; *Le Bourgeois aux champs* is a satire on the futility of immediate reform.

As a man interested and deeply concerned for the welfare of mankind, Brieux is a brave and occasionally inspired dramatist. In *Les Avariés* and three or four other vigorous and pointedly didactic plays, he has honestly and nobly done his best to open the eyes of his people to evils which ought to and can be remedied. *Les Avariés* tells certain unpleasant but necessary truths; *Maternité* urges those who are attempting to remedy the evil of depopulation in France that they must first of all respect motherhood per se, and protect all mothers, whether they be within or without the marriage bond. The fact that these truths had to be spoken was undoubtedly detrimental to the plays as works of art; Brieux therefore sacrificed the artist in himself for the good of the race. But fortunately he at times combined his artistry with his ardor as a reformer, and produced works which will last after his suggested reforms are no longer of use. If we consider each play, we find that those in which something is assumed as being basically wrong, tacitly, by most thinking people, are invariably better than those in which the dramatist was forced to break the silence. That is to say, Brieux the innovator tended to lose his artistic consciousness in proportion to the novelty of the theme treated. In *Blanchette* and *La Robe rouge*,

for example, he was able to take certain things for granted and proceed to write a highly effective play; in *Les Avariés* he must perforce proceed with greater care, and explain at length certain points which, if his thesis were taken for granted and were universally known and accepted, might well be omitted. If this play were to be presented exclusively before audiences of physicians, much could be cut, and the play be infinitely better. His achievement then must be honored as an act of courage (that goes without saying) and not — in spite of a few stirring and truly dramatic scenes — as drama.

Brieux's conscience stands in the way of his being a great dramatist; his significance will be realized just as Bernard Shaw's will be realized, by reason of particular scenes and particular plays, which are good in spite of their social purposefulness. Like his literary forebear Emile Augier, Brieux will be remembered as a painter of character long after his topical plays have ceased to interest. Augier's *Le Fils de Giboyer* and *Le Mariage d'Olympe* are still interesting because of their characters, not because they treat of "Anti-clerical" politics or the "Reign of the Courtesan." When or if the particular legal abuses attacked in *La Robe rouge* are remedied and the system of finding places for school teachers so severely criticized in *Blanchette* is modified, these plays will remain, because they tell good stories and paint real and living people.

What Brieux would have been had his social conscience not been so highly developed is of

course impossible to determine; perhaps he would not have had recourse to the theater as a medium of expression for his ideas. We must therefore be content to accept his work as it stands. A most hopeful sign lies in the fact that his latest play is in the vein of highest comedy; *Le Bourgeois aux champs* was written not so much to demonstrate the uselessness of ignorant though well-intentioned reform as to draw the picture of a modern bourgeois. Let us hope that Brieux has realized that his greatest function lies in his good plays, not in his attempts, however sincere and intelligent, to remedy evils which can scarcely be remedied through the agency of the drama.

*Blanchette*, *La Robe rouge*, *La Femme seule*, *Le Bourgeois aux champs*, *Les Trois filles de M. Dupont*, and *Résultat des courses!* are the plays which in my opinion contain as wholes or in part the best that Brieux has to offer. Certain it is that in other plays — notably in *Le Berceau*, *Les Remplaçantes*, and *Maternité* — occur scenes and passages comparable with and in some instances superior to the best in *Résultat des courses!*, *La Femme seule*, and *Les Trois filles de M. Dupont*, but I believe that the six plays I have selected will stand the test of time.

*La Robe rouge* is the best of these. It is a play "with a purpose": it is intended to point out, to the end of remedying, the fearful abuse of legal power. In order to obtain an "advance," a French criminal lawyer must convict, and according to the number of years of convictions he reports to headquarters are his chances of advance bettered or destroyed. The universality of the



play lies not so much in the fact that a certain lawyer misused his power, ruining the family and happiness of a Basque peasant, but that every one who is invested with authority tends to misuse that authority to the detriment of mankind. Brieux is an anarchist in that he believes that no man is good enough to sit in judgment over his fellow-beings. *La Robe rouge* must surely first have occurred to its author as an intensely dramatic situation, then he must have made the direct application. If this was not the method, then Brieux must be accounted the thesis-dramatist par excellence. So well does he make us forget the theme in the story and characters that we are not aware of being instructed. It seems that Brieux worked so vigorously and sincerely that he forgot to interpolate such scenes of cut-and-dried though admirable logic which go far to mar plays like *Les Avariés*. Few plays can boast so tense, so inevitable, so crushing a climax. Beginning in the expository first act, developing pitilessly through the second, pausing a moment in the third, it finally rushes with vertiginous haste to the terrible murder-scene, which closes the play. The dramatist forgets the rules of the well-made play, proceeds developing where Scribe would have offered a dénouement; he combines climax with catastrophe, and leaves us gasping. The execution of Mouzon by the woman whose happiness he has ruined does not only seem natural and inevitable, it creates a feeling in the breast of the spectator of personal hatred, so that when Yanetta plants the knife in the lawyer's back the audience invariably puts itself in the woman's position, and exults. The ten



or fifteen minutes' applause which often follows the close of the play is rather an indication of this personal attitude on the part of the audience than a particular expression of pleasure or interest.

As *Blanchette* and *Les Trois filles de M. Dupont* are accessible to English readers, and are already well known, there is no necessity to enter into detail. The first of these plays is notable among other things for its true characterization of old Père Rousset and his wife; here are average peasants, not stock comedy figures. Brieux's play came at a time when Zola's grotesque peasants stood for what is most exaggerated in ultra-Naturalistic literature. Brieux was sufficiently independent and clear-sighted to draw men and women whom he knew as living beings, not as animals. Père Rousset behaves and speaks at times (in the stage version and the printed book, which has been in places toned down in the translation) in a most realistic and disgusting manner, but he is good at heart, and his indignation justifiable. Blanchette herself seems a trifle stiff, but perhaps that is what the author intended, or possibly he felt the need of exaggerating the antagonism between parent and child, for dramatic purposes. Whatever the technical faults of the play, whatever its other shortcomings, it stands in much the same relation with the modern French drama that Balzac's *Scènes de la vie de province* did to the literature of his day.

Again, the particular scenes in which the characters are allowed to develop, constitute the chief value of *Les Trois filles de M. Dupont*. That scene in which the Mairauts and the Duponts ar-

range for their children's union, in the first act, seems to justify Shaw's statement that "in that great comedy which Balzac calls the 'comedy of humanity,' to be played for the amusement of the gods rather than that of the French public, there is no summit in the barren plain that stretches from Mount Molière to our times until we reach Brioux." This play may suffer from a too great rigidity of structure; there is in the last act what Jules Lemaître called too much the appearance of a "Q.E.D.," but when we are offered such types as Dupont and Mairaut and scenes of the kind I have referred to, we cannot quarrel with the author.

*Résultat des courses!*, while it is a "purpose" play, is interesting and valuable as a picture of the artisan classes of Paris, among which Brioux is perfectly at home. When he planned this play, he went among them to get his local color. An amusing incident is recounted by Adolphe Brisson in his volume, *Les Prophètes*:

When the time came for the afternoon "appetizer" he accompanied his companions to the bar. He then stood upon a table:

"My friends," he said, "I have deceived you; I'm not a chiseler, I'm a dramatist. My name is Eugène Brioux; I've had plays produced which you've probably heard of — *Les Bienfaiteurs*, *Les Trois filles de M. Dupont*, and *Blanchette*."

An assistant who was something of a literary fellow murmured: "Lord! Do we know *Blanchette*!"

"You will invite us to your première, won't you?"

"You'll be there —"

When the curtain rose at the *répétition générale* the

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entire work-shop was present; it was before this sympathetic and excited audience that the drama unfolded. . . . "That evening," said Brioux, "I was positively intoxicated with pleasure. It moved me as I have never been moved before. I love my chisellers better than I do the *abonnés* of the Comédie Française."

The plot is simple: Arsène Chantaud (played, it is related, with deep insight and remarkable sincerity by Antoine), one of the chisellers in a bronze-shop in Paris, has won a considerable sum of money from the races. Not content with this, he continues to bet, and eventually loses money belonging to his employer. The employer allows him to go after he has signed a confession; but due to the fact that he is without the necessary credentials, he can find no employment elsewhere. Things go from bad to worse: the family is turned out of house and home; and one day Chantaud, now totally demoralized, is arrested as a vagrant. His son, however, has meantime, by dint of hard labor reestablished the family fortunes, and brings his ruined father back, a hopeless wreck. This simple story, with its equally simple moral, is told with "sufficient candor not to fear what is banal, and sufficient talent not to write it," in Lemaître's words. Here again it is the characters, the milieu, the loving care with which the whole environment is sketched, which recommend themselves to us. *Résultat des courses!* is not a very significant play, but it is a sympathetic picture of life.

It is a convenient if at times rather arbitrary procedure to divide the works of certain authors into "periods," each representing a distinct phase

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in the mental or spiritual evolution of the writer. In the case of Brieux, this method of classification is not inappropriate. The early plays — *Blanchette*, *La Coupée*, *Les Bienfaiteurs*, and *Résultat des courses!* — are a series of contemporaneous pictures of classes in the humbler walks of life: of the farmer, the bourgeois, the petty merchant, the manufacturer, the artisan. These works are, besides, indicative in a way of their author's predilection for social problems, but he has not yet fully entered that phase in which he becomes rabid and prophetically didactic. That Storm and Stress period includes *La Robe rouge*, *Les Trois filles de M. Dupont*, *Les Avariés*, and *Maternité*. At first he was content merely with social comedies; then he must needs preach jeremiads. (We must always however except *La Robe rouge*, in which his art hides for the time being all didactic purpose.) These works are powerful and crushing indictments of "systems" and social wrongs, they are expressions of the author's most deep-felt convictions. He felt evidently that uncompromising force was the best means to his end. But with years has come a degree of moderation, a more serene and philosophical outlook upon life; a mood of quiet and limited optimism has taken the place of the earlier unrestrained outbursts, *Les Hanneçons*, a comedy of manners, followed *Maternité*, and after it came *Simone*, a serious play with a "happy" ending. To this later period belong also *La Française*, a somewhat disappointing piece — a defense of the Frenchwoman and her home, with a good deal of political talk —; *La Foi*, a philosophical and religious play; and *Suzette*, a

plea written in a manifestly sympathetic vein for the child of divorced parents. In spite of occasional "strong" scenes and a continual striving for moral lessons, all these plays are on a much lower emotional plane than those belonging to the Storm and Stress. Vituperation has given way to sympathetic reasoning and firm and convincing argument — these plays have lost something in strength, but they have gained in breadth of view and humanity.

Human as these plays are, and vital as the interest in them must be, something is lacking. The social reformer must of course smash idols, but he should occasionally suggest a remedy. This Brieux has done, but only in a negative manner; not until *La Femme seule*, produced in December 1912, do we see an individual contending with the forces of society, with half a chance for success.

In *La Femme seule* the author asks, "What can a young woman, who wishes or is forced to remain single and independent, do to make a living?" The play shows that society — in France, at any rate — does all in its power to prevent her making an honest living; but it shows further what individual strength and courage can do, and in the character of the "emancipated" Thérèse, we have what to my knowledge is the only woman in the contemporary French drama who at all approaches economic independence in the face of practically unsurmountable obstacles.

Thérèse, left an orphan at the age of nineteen, has been living for some years with her godparents, Monsieur and Madame Guéret, when she learns that the family notary has absconded with

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a large sum of money, including her dowry. René, her fiancé, cannot marry her, because his parents will not consent to an alliance which brings them no material benefit. The godparents offer to take Thérèse to Evreux, where they must go, but the girl tells them that she has "no intention of leaving Paris."

M. GUÉRET. I don't understand? . . .

MME. GUÉRET. You're not going to live in Paris alone?

THÉRÈSE. I am.

M. GUÉRET. All alone! I tell you, I don't understand.

THÉRÈSE. Both of you have been so good to me! I shall remember your goodness as long as I live —. My father's death left me absolutely alone in the world; he was only a friend of yours, and I am not related to you. You took me in and treated me as your own daughter for four years; I appreciate that with all my heart. I am twenty-three, and I don't want to be dependent on you.

She decides to live alone in Paris; she has been offered a position on the *Femme Libre*, a recently-established periodical. It is taken for granted that René cannot marry her: she has no dowry. She has hopes, however, that he will offer to do so in spite of his parents, and just as he bids her good-by, she says to him:

THÉRÈSE. Shall we marry, in spite of everything? Listen to me: I love you more than you can imagine, more than I ever let you know.— Have confidence in me: place your future in my hands. Marry me, and never mind the consequences. You'll see, we'll be happy! You have no idea how capable I am, how much energy I have in reserve.



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I'll work, and you will, too. You weren't successful when you worked alone, but you will feel stronger when you feel me at your side, to console you in failure, to encourage and help you in success — I'm willing to live the simplest sort of life, René, the humblest — until we two, by our effort, an effort bright with hope and pride, shall conquer, together —!

RENÉ. I assure you, Thérèse — my parents —

THÉRÈSE. [*After a long pause.*] Go! Poor boy! Forget what I've said. Adieu!

RENÉ. No, not adieu! I shall make my father —

THÉRÈSE. It's too late. I don't want *you* now! .

The second act opens upon the editorial offices of the *Femme Libre*. Thérèse has found an occupation assuring her a sufficient income for her needs, and lives happily, the more so as René has had the courage to defy his parents and work for his own living in his own way. But owing to a lack of interest on the part of the subscribers the magazine must be reduced in size, and all the salaries correspondingly cut. It is not long before Monsieur Nérissé, the editor, makes love to Thérèse, and she is obliged to leave.

The last act finds Thérèse with her godparents at Evreux, but living on an independent basis. For three months after leaving the magazine, she had sought without success a position which would yield enough to keep her from starving. "A single woman," she says, "why she's an outcast! I had no end of trouble in trying to rent a room. How often have I heard them say: 'We don't rent to single women.' One day when I insisted, I heard the porter say to his wife, behind my back: 'She's plain enough to be honest!'"



But on her return to Evreux, she organizes a woman's trade union on a small scale, which succeeds so well that the workingmen take fright; a delegate is sent from Paris to demand the dissolution of the little syndicate. The delegates' motto is "The husband's place is the workshop, the wife's at her own fireside." The delegates' threats go unheeded, for Thérèse stands her ground firmly until, at last, the workers at the very factory in which the union has been organized, strike, and destroy the women's workroom. For the moment, Thérèse is beaten, but it is only for the moment. "I am going," she cries. She is going to René, but — and her words are certainly intended as prophetic: she will never rest content by her own fireside! — she is going to conquer.

M. GUÉRET. Where are you going?

THÉRÈSE. I am going where I feel it is my duty to go.

M. FÉLIAT. Wait until to-morrow.

THÉRÈSE. No, I take the night train for Paris. But the workingmen need have no cause to rejoice. In this new war of the sexes, it is the men who will be beaten, because women work for lower wages — they don't have to make money to squander at the saloon! Only the men will be conquered, only the men, Monsieur Féliat! The sons of middle-class families who haven't enough stamina to marry girls without dowries will be sure to find those same girls later — poor girls whom they forced to go to work! . . . A new era has begun. In every land, among rich and poor, out of every home deserted by drunkards or left empty by those who fear the tribulations of marriage, a woman will rise up and leave, and come and take her place beside you, in the factory, in the workshop, in the office. You wouldn't take her as a housewife, and she

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refuses to prostitute herself to you — she will be a working woman, a competitor, and a successful competitor! — Good-by!

Brieux's latest play is *Le Bourgeois aux champs*. "In this play," says Robert de Flers, "the peasant types are drawn with great skill; we feel that they are true, so true indeed that they tend to throw the principal character, Monsieur Cocatrix, into the shade. Monsieur Brieux has attempted to mold into a single figure two different bourgeois types . . . one studied from life, one from literature." Whatever he has attempted, he has succeeded in creating a worthy successor to Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, Augier's Monsieur Poirier, and Labiche's Monsieur Perrichon. The essentially comic side of the worthy would-be agricultural reformer is afforded a much larger place than is customary in Brieux's plays; Brieux seems at last to be ridding himself of the idea that each play must teach or prove or destroy.

Cocatrix, a man of wealth and ambition, has decided to leave Paris and establish himself in the country, in order to reform farming methods and ameliorate the material and moral welfare of the peasants. Together with his wife and daughter Fernande and his assistant Victor Maillard, he enthusiastically starts his campaign. Loaded down with works on scientific farming, hygiene, "alcoholism," full of ideas on the "dignity of labor" and the equality of men, he lives secure in the belief that he will be received with open arms by the people of the country. But he is not long in finding out that he is hopelessly unfit

for his task, that at every turn those whom he had intended to benefit do their best to ruin him; they poach upon his preserves, steal the fruit from his trees, and destroy his property. He is an intruder always under suspicion; this constant warfare ends in making him still more illogical and fitfully impetuous and impulsive. He will not allow his employees, for instance, their habitual morning drink, and insists on giving them a chemical non-alcoholic concoction against which they naturally rebel. He believes he knows what will do them good, and tries at every turn to force it down their throats. It is to this that they object. One of the peasants, Biriôt, is in conference with the good bourgeois:

COCATRIX. . . . It's just as if we were total strangers to one another.

BIRIÔT. Well, you don't belong to this section —

COCATRIX. [*Discouraged.*] What have I done to you? Why don't they like me around here? Tell me, think now! I could have stayed in Paris, and lived on my income from this farm, and have had nothing to do with you here.

BIRIÔT. That would've satisfied us to a T.

COCATRIX. Did you ever ask yourselves why I've gone to such trouble?

BIRIÔT. It amuses you.

COCATRIX. No, it doesn't amuse me.

BIRIÔT. Then it's so's you can be deputy. . . .

COCATRIX. Look at me now . . . let's speak as man to man; two comrades — I have your good at heart. If I've done you any injury, any of you, or if I've made any mistakes, it would be much better of you to tell me right out, and not try to get even with me. . . . You believe what I say, don't you?

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BIRIOT. I don't know —

COCATRIX. You don't know? Don't I like you?

BIRIOT. The same way's you like your horse: to get him to work harder for you.

COCATRIX. Then I'm merely selfish, am I? No, you're wrong. Give me a chance, now, to prove my friendship for you. That's all I ask —

BIRIOT. All right, I was wanting to speak to you about something —

COCATRIX. Tell me, tell me. It must be something impossible for me to refuse it.

BIRIOT. All right: I want you to recommend me —

COCATRIX. Where? To whom? For what?

BIRIOT. For a conductor.

COCATRIX. You —? A conductor?

Cocatrix's heart may be in the right place, but his methods are wrong. He is a well-intentioned but totally incompetent reformer. And here is precisely the proof of the fact that Brieux has not wished to write a thesis play. Had he intended to demonstrate that agricultural methods needed radical reformation, that "reformers" could not deal adequately with the question, he would not have taken such pains to paint us the genial portrait of Monsieur Cocatrix. Surely no one could ever imagine that *he* could reform! No, the *Bourgeois aux Champs* is happily little other than a character-study.

The last act accomplishes the transformation in Cocatrix's mind which was already beginning in the second. The somewhat unnecessary and banal love-interest with Fernande and Victor is brought to its long-anticipated conclusion. The family, haunted with the thought that they must

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spend the winter in idleness (they are still only in October), finding "music, painting, looking at photographs, puzzles, and 'Bridge,'" very tiresome, are "dying of ennui." There is only one thing to do: move to town. Cocatrix decides to do this, and to run for deputy of the district. As the peasants come to protest against an unpopular decision he has made, he addresses them from his open window:

Fellow Citizens: Certain enemies, jealous men from the neighboring villages, have circulated the report that the newly projected street-car line would not run through our section. They lie . . . the line as planned includes a junction, so that you will have two lines. [*Cheers.*] . . . Your magnificent fields, your handsome town, will receive that consideration which is due their importance. . . . And that is not all, for I myself will work in order to better it. I have great pleasure in announcing to you a new postoffice. . . . I hereby humbly solicit your help, and ask you for your support in obtaining the vacant place of Councillor. I make no promises which I do not fulfill — your principles are my own principles, and mine yours. . . . My platform in short is this: to do all in my power for the country people. Pensions for aged farmers, reduction of the number of officers without affecting those already holding office; suppression of a standing army and the establishment of a garrison in the neighboring sub-prefecture. You are the masters — a free Church with the State in complete control. And let me warn you to be on your guard against eleventh-hour conversions: my past will answer for my future! [*Cheers and applause.*] My friends, my dear friends! I am your servant, your friend: you may count on me as you would on yourselves. Oligarchy of the masses, human solidarity, social capillarity. The Will of the People! [*Cheers.*] Hurrah, hurrah!

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CROWD. [*Outside.*] Bravo! Bravo!

COCATRIX. Cheer, you fools!

COUNT BOUCHIN. My dear friend, you are far too modest: you should run for deputy right now.

COCATRIX. [*To the crowd.*] Wait, wait! My friends. You are my friends, you are like a family to me. I wish to announce to you some good news: I am truly a Friend of the People, and this is the proof of what I say: I, the libeled bourgeois, I am giving in marriage the hand of my own daughter to a simple workingman! [*Cheers.*] Victor, Fernande, bow!

BOUCHIN. [*To the public.*] He will be Minister!

COCATRIX. [*To himself, gravely, as he wipes his brow.*] Poor people!

Bouchin's remark is reminiscent of that of the bonhomme Poirier which closes Augier's *Le Gendre de M. Poirier*: ". . . et pair de France en quarante-huit!" Brieux's ability at the age of fifty-six to adapt himself to a new manner, his tendency to draw character for its own sake, his preoccupation with human beings rather than with human institutions, may well inspire the hope in us that he may still write *the* comedy of the generation, a modern *Gendre de M. Poirier*!



## GEORGES DE PORTO-RICHE

GEORGES DE PORTO-RICHE is a Frenchman among Frenchmen, a Latin among Latins. It is rather difficult for the average Anglo-Saxon to see much in his work outside what appears to be a continual obsession of the senses. Donnay may analyze love, Bataille use it as a prime motive to human action, but Porto-Riche revels in it. Every poem, every play of his is a love-story. He once said: "My first happy memory is that of a woman." Had George Moore been a Frenchman, he might have written *Amoureuse*.

The most dilettante fashion of life of this poet has given him ample opportunity to write his plays at leisure. The first appeared in 1873, the latest in 1911. On one of his plays, *Le Vieil Homme*, he spent fifteen years; recently he announced the publication of three plays upon which he has been working for at least five years, and which are not expected for another two or three. Between the production of *Le Passé* and *Le Vieil Homme* there was an interval of thirteen years, during which only one play, a short unimportant piece in two acts, saw the stage.

Born at Bordeaux in 1849, of parents of Italian extraction, he spent his early youth in dreamy unhappiness. His must have been an extremely sensitive nature, if we can credit his sentiment set forth in the following verses:



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Ma tristesse vous offensa.  
Hélas! ma tête est orpheline,  
Voilà longtemps que je l'incline,  
Etant petit, ça commença.

Pouvre écolier près de mon frère,  
J'étais vêtu du bleu sarrot.  
Heureux celui que l'on préfère!  
Ma mère m'appelait " De Trop! "

De Trop, ce nom dit mes détresses;  
Ma mère ne m'a pas chéri  
De mon enfance sans caresses  
Je reste encore endolori.

. . . Je fus de ceux-là qui demeurent  
Seuls au dortoir, un été plein.  
Ce n'est pas quand les parents meurent,  
C'est alors qu'on est orphelin.

Like so many of his confrères he was forced to take up the study of Law, but he soon abandoned it as hopelessly uncongenial. " Secretly flattered," says the poet's biographer, Claude R. Marx, " by the youth's abandonment of his career, his father even encouraged him to work at literature." In spite of Porto-Riche's loneliness, of which he complains in the poem above quoted, his first verses were dedicated in turn to his mother, father, and brothers. Slight volumes, appearing between 1872 and 1877, *Prima Verba*, *Pommes d'Eve*, and *Tout n'est pas Rose*, show clear traces of literary " influences," chiefly Victor Hugo, a poet warmly admired by the impressionable youth. They were judged sufficiently important to be regarded as dangerous, as the author was imprisoned, " for political reasons." The sensual and hypersensi-

tive nature of the man permeated these early verses, and the sentiment of love, fleshly and ethereal in turn, struck the note that was later to be heard through every play.

A sojourn in the south of France and in Italy soon gave wide scope to Porto-Riche's imagination; the atmosphere of those lands he seems to have assimilated at once and breathed into the softest verses and the most amorous scenes of his poetic tragedy, *L'Infidèle*, a play which was not written however until many years later.

Returning to Paris, where he made the acquaintance of Maupassant, he lived the true *Vie de Bohème*, and like many another, carried manuscripts of plays from manager to manager, without success. Leaving aside the relatively unimportant poetic plays — *Le Vertige*, *Un Drama sous Philippe II*, *Les Deux fautes*, and *Vanina* — all belonging to the 'seventies, his first important mature work was *La Chance de Françoise*, a prose character piece. This one-act comedy was written in 1883, but not until Antoine had made way for the productions of new authors did it see the boards. It was first produced in 1888, and was so successful that it has been often revived. After this work had given the author some degree of renown, the way was a little easier for the next plays. If *La Chance de Françoise*, as a Théâtre Libre study, did not attract very much attention, the next play did: *L'Infidèle* raised something of a controversy. The daring lines, the rather brutal sensuality of the work, appeared to shock even a Parisian public of the day, yet when the play was revived at the Porte Saint-Martin in the autumn of

1913, the audience was enthusiastic. But *L'Infidèle* must be confessed a little trashy; even the lovely verses cannot atone for the banal and melodramatic story of the love-murder. The play, however, paved the way for Porto-Riche's triumphal entry into the theater as one of the greatest dramatic writers of his day. He was soon to produce work of finer caliber. Mme. Réjane's production of *Amoureuse* in 1891 still remains one of the memories which linger in the minds of those first-nighters who were present at the premières even of *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Chantecler*. *Amoureuse* was in many senses an epoch-making play. Even "Uncle" Francisque Sarcey, the critic-despot, declared that it would be played for twenty years, and the latest revival, twenty-two years after, afforded no indication of flagging interest on the part of the public. M. Marx quotes a saying to the effect that if Porto-Riche is not the father of many plays, of how many is he not the grandfather? At this date it is perhaps a little difficult to realize the originality of that early effort, especially in the light of the vast number of derivative works. The best manner therefore of approaching *Amoureuse* is to read the plays of the epoch and those immediately preceding it. *Amoureuse* is so astoundingly natural, its dialogue so easy and flowing, the characters are so real, that a first reading is likely to leave us asking, "What is so great about it all?" The very simplicity of it, the unemphatic action, the quietness with which the slight plot is developed, make us part of the action; here at last is the *slice of life* for which the Naturalists had striven so hard! The gentle

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Porto-Riche, at heart a member of no school or coterie, has outstripped all his contemporaries. And his subject is developed by means of the *ménage à trois*; but the *trois* — the husband, lover, and wife — are so much like ordinary human beings, that any other course than the one adopted would seem false. And the effect is alarming. Yet the Anglo-Saxon must admit the truth of the picture. He may object to the spectacle of an over-sexed woman, but granted the hypothesis, he cannot question the art and essential saneness of the author's treatment of that woman, her husband, and her lover. The subject is indeed somewhat unpleasant.

GERMAINE. It is not a question of right, my dear; it is a question of love.

ETIENNE. But I am no less your victim, as I have been for the past eight years.

GERMAINE. For the past eight years?

ETIENNE. Yes, and my torture has not yet come to an end.

GERMAINE. Treason, eh?

ETIENNE. For many years we must live side by side, acting our parts in unison — all our personal habits, our interests, even our deceptions must mingle together. We are condemned to talk love to one another eternally, every day!

GERMAINE. And every evening.

ETIENNE. . . . My physical self does not matter, I want my thoughts to myself.

GERMAINE. You seem to want to get rid of me at those times — I can't understand it!

ETIENNE. I should welcome them, and you, if you weren't always the first to wish for them.

GERMAINE. You lie.

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Then the mistake of the marriage, a mistake on Etienne's part, is spoken of for the first time between husband and wife.

GERMAINE. If you were certain that I loved you, you ought never to have married me!

ETIENNE. I was wrong to do it.

GERMAINE. You were over thirty, I was twenty . . . I told you I adored you, and you took me. Why were you so good, and so feeble? Why did you let me believe in your love? Why didn't you lie, deceive me? Why weren't you cruel at first? Why have you waited so long to let me learn the truth?

ETIENNE. I was wrong.

GERMAINE. There! You are an egoist at bottom, a real Don Juan: you wanted to be loved.

ETIENNE. Not so much as I have been!

GERMAINE. Did I give you more than you bargained for?

ETIENNE. Yes.

GERMAIN. Poor man! I love him too much, and he loves me too little. That is my crime!

ETIENNE. Our misery!

At the end of the act Etienne leaves for Italy, and half in a joking mood he tells the "friend" to "Take her; you adore her; console her. I give her to you." In a fit of rage and unsatisfied love she throws herself into Pascal's arms. On Etienne's return he finds them together. He sends Pascal off, and Germaine and Etienne have their final explanation. Etienne, practically convinced of his wife's guilt, and sure that he does not love her now, wants her to leave his house forever. She prepares to go. But the moment she puts on her cloak and makes a step toward the door, he bars the way.

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ETIENNE. Where are you going?

GERMAINE. That is no concern of yours.

ETIENNE. I want to know. [*She puts on her gloves.*]  
You're going to kill yourself — I know it.

GERMAINE. [*Concealing her emotion.*] You're mistaken; a woman who is going to kill herself does not put on her gloves so calmly.

ETIENNE. Then where are you going? Tell me. [*As she attempts to pass him, he again bars her way.*]  
You're not going to *him*, are you?

GERMAINE. Your jealousy comes a trifle late!

ETIENNE. You still bear my name.

GERMAINE. You have told me to go — and I am going.

ETIENNE. Wait until I have had an explanation with him!

GERMAINE. I shan't stay another five minutes under this roof.

ETIENNE. If I have to put you under lock and key and force you to stay, you shall not go to that cad! I forbid you! [*Once more she tries to go, but he seizes her violently by the arm. She screams. Ashamed of himself he says:*] Oh, I've hurt you. I am sorry.

GERMAINE. [*Full of hope.*] Etienne!

ETIENNE. [*Bitterly, after a moment's pause.*] Why did my jealousy, my fear, make me open that door for you again? Why did I prevent your going? Why this wretched contradiction, which forced me to come back? *Can you go now?* We have fought like mortal enemies, insulted one another unpardonably; I misread you: you have been unfaithful to me — and yet here I am. We are bound together by the evil we have done, and by what we have said to each other. How vile, how corrupt it all is! [*He cries.*]

GERMAINE. [*Also crying.*] My God!

ETIENNE. [*Shamefacedly, after a pause.*] You did lie, didn't you? You weren't going to him, were you?



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GERMAINE. No.

ETIENNE. You still love me, you have never stopped loving me? Answer, please, you see what a coward I am!

GERMAINE. Why do I need answer? Won't what I have done always stand between us? We can't live together now?

ETIENNE. [*With bowed head.*] Perhaps.

GERMAINE. Perhaps. Then is there no justice?

ETIENNE. [*Tenderly.*] Thank God!

GERMAINE. [*Going toward the door.*] You're mad — I'd better go.

ETIENNE. [*Stopping her.*] No!

GERMAINE. Think, Etienne, you will be very unhappy.

ETIENNE. [*Not daring to look at her nor approach her.*] What difference does that make?

Germaine's supreme love may prove a source of pain to herself and Etienne, but its very strength binds the pair together. Her infidelity was merely an incident, which served only to strengthen their union. No, for the perfect amorist, Porto-Riche, "there is no justice, thank God!"; there are only feelings and sentiments, and the natural attraction of one human being for another.

This attitude may not be moral but, says this dramatist, it is life; it *may* indeed be the highest morality, but Porto-Riche is far too subtle an artist to say so. Together with Maurice Donnay he says — although not directly — that whatever is sincere and natural is right. Donnay declares that conjugal infidelity is a "social necessity," and it is his wont to show that society usually punishes offenders against its laws, not because the offenders are "immoral" in any abstract sense of the term, but because they are not "playing the game."



The wages of sin is not always death, say Donnay and Porto-Riche, but sometimes peace and happiness through suffering (in Donnay's *Amants*) and greater love (*Amoureuse*). How far this is from *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray!*

Unwittingly has Porto-Riche exercised an influence over his followers which has been far from good. *Amoureuse* was among the first of the modern "triangle" plays; what he did so perfectly a host of imitators have often debased. But he can no more be blamed for this than can Brioux, whose *Damaged Goods* appeared as a signal for those works in which the authors strove only to excite by means of the externally sensational.

Porto-Riche's next play was *Le Passé*, by some critics considered superior to *Amoureuse*. But the earlier play fortunately lacked the brutality of *Le Passé*, the action was less artificial and the characters truer to life. This play is the story of a lying lover and a devoted mistress. The link of passion is apparently adamant, but in the hour of doubt and trial, she realizes the essential smallness, the deceit and hypocrisy of the man she loves. "Go away," she cries; "you will always lie!" The "all for love" theme, which was the basis of *Amoureuse*, is varied here a little, but we are left rather uncertain as to the dramatist's exact intention.

The long-awaited *Vieil Homme* reached the stage in 1911. It is a bulky play (four hundred closely-printed pages), and by far the most ambitious of Porto-Riche's works. The story is summed up by Edmond Stoullig in his well-known

*Annales du théâtre et de la musique*: “The ‘Old Man’ is the indomitable instinct for *galanterie* in the heart of Michel Fontanet. Was he not one of those nomads in quest of the baser appetites, of adultery for its own sake, who sow despair and moral ruin in their wake? So for some twelve years has he rendered his unfortunate wife Thérèse most unhappy. In vain does this Don Juan, who is past forty, endeavor to quiet down; in vain has he buried himself in the country, and established a great printing firm at Vizille, in the Dauphiné; in vain is he a good father and a good husband, very much in love with his wife; in vain, attached to his work and faithful to his duties. Now comes the brazen coquette, a woman of pleasure, to all appearances a simple little bourgeoisie, and with her sensuality shatters at a blow all of the former *roué’s* fine resolutions, at a time when he was at last beginning to settle down. Scarcely has Brigitte Allain set foot in the peaceful home when he feels his butterfly nature returning, as he comes to know the pretty attractive creature. And she is not long to hold out against his advances. Meantime Madame Fontanet learns the truth. But the weak man, the man of pleasure, sacrifices more persons than one in his fall: his son is claimed as a victim. At first the author has shown us Augustin, the child of the household, an impressionable and sentimental youth, susceptible and perhaps intelligent beyond his years. Unconsciously he falls in love with Brigitte. Convinced of the intrigue between his father and the woman he adores in his own naïve way, the poor child seeks death by jumping over a nearby precipice.

He is brought to his parents in a dying condition. . . . while outside a tempest rages. . . . Over the body of her dead child the woman curses his executioner who, for the satisfaction of his basest instincts, had not hesitated for an instant to sacrifice the two beings *for* whom he ought to have sacrificed everything. But love, love stronger than all else, arrests the curse on the outraged woman's lips. We feel, alas, that she will forgive him, that she has indeed already done so."

"L'Amour est une chose et le bonheur en est une autre"—"love is one thing, happiness another"—says Michel in this play. Porto-Riche wrote *Amoureuse* and *Le Vieil Homme* to show this. Germaine and Thérèse are those women who love the deepest, and suffer the most, yet somehow the poet makes us feel that these are just the ones who live the best lives. There is no question of moral right or wrong; Porto-Riche little cares to discuss the question whether Germaine or Thérèse ought to leave their respective husbands; he tells us that such wives do not leave them, because they cannot.

Porto-Riche is now at work on four plays<sup>1</sup>—*L'Amour de Manon*, *Le Paradis perdu*, *L'Élève*, and *La Revanche*—the last three of which are to be collected in the same volume with *Le Vieil Homme*, under the general title of *Drames d'Amour et d'Amitié*. There is little reason to suppose that they will differ radically from the earlier plays, so that any judgment now formed

<sup>1</sup> A little one-act comedy, *Zubiri*, was produced at the Comédie Royale in 1912. The subject was taken from one of Victor Hugo's poems.

of this dramatist will doubtless hold true of those works to come.

The author of *Amoureuse* is pretty well assured of a place in the front rank of the dramatists of his generation; his sensitive nature, his genius for analysis of the feminine soul — be it in man or woman — his gift of style, his ability to construct a smooth and swift-moving story, entitle him to more glory than would his entrance into the Académie Française, an honor which has not yet been vouchsafed to him. Yet possibly he cherishes the thought of being the Forty-first Immortal, together with Balzac, Daudet, Maupassant, and Flaubert, and is content to remain simply the “conservateur” of the Bibliothèque Mazarine, the windows of which overlook the Cupola of the Académie, he the author of *Amoureuse!*

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THERE are few contrasts more striking than that between Porto-Riche and Paul Hervieu: on the one hand, perfect freedom from restraint in the consideration and treatment of human passions, on the other, almost mathematical precision in the delineation of men and women struggling with faulty social conditions and prejudices. Porto-Riche tells a love story for the sake of telling it and in order to analyze the feelings of the characters, Hervieu tells a love-story, if such it can be called, in which passions play but a subordinate part. Porto-Riche is interested in the characters as human beings, Hervieu as puppets who are part of a larger scheme of things. Hervieu delights in showing the struggle, Porto-Riche the contestants.

Paul Hervieu was born at Neuilly-on-the-Seine in 1857. His early education was of a fragmentary character for, entering the Lycée Bonaparte at Paris in 1869 he was soon forced, when the War of 1870 broke out, to leave for Dieppe. From that city he attended in turn, but for short periods only, schools in Boulogne-sur-mer, then Fontainebleau, and at last returned to Paris, and entered the Lycée Condorcet. After the completion of his preliminary studies, he became a student

in the Law School from which he was graduated in 1881, assuming a position in a law office immediately after. Appointed secretary to the Mexican Embassy, he refused that honor, preferring to remain in his native country and assume charge of the *Républicain de Seine-et-Marne*. In 1882 Hervieu's first book, *Diogène-le-Chien*, made its appearance. Guy de Maupassant gave it high praise and predicted that the author would "soon be known." From this time on Hervieu continued to contribute articles, sketches, and stories, to the daily papers; a number of these were later published in book form. Between the years 1881 and 1896 he put forth numerous novels and further sketches and stories: *La Bétise parisienne*, *Les Yeux verts et les yeux bleus*, *L'Inconnu*, *Les Deux plaisanteries*, *Flirt*, *L'Exorcisée*, *Peints par eux-mêmes*, *L'Armature* and *Le Petit Duc*. His first play, *Point de Lendemain*, an adaptation in two scenes of a story by Vivant Denon, was produced in 1890. Alphonse Daudet it was who suggested the writing of the next play, which was *Les Paroles Restent*, a "dramatic comedy" in three acts. This was produced at the Vaudeville in 1892. Three years later the youthful playwright achieved his first notable success: *Les Tenailles* received the sanction of production at the Comédie Française, the austere temple of French Classicism. The same theater stood sponsor for the next two plays, *La Loi de l'homme* and *L'Enigme*. But it was *La Course du Flambeau* (given by Madame Réjane at the Vaudeville) that was destined to make its author famous in his own land and establish his reputation on a firm basis. *Théroigne*



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*de Méricourt*, a long historical drama in six acts, was played by Sarah Bernhardt at her own theater. *Le Dédale*, one of Hervieu's greatest successes, was seen at the Comédie the following year. *Le Réveil*, *Modestie*, *Connais-toi*, *Bagatelle*, and *Le Destin est Maître*, complete the list of plays.

Member of the Académie Française, president of the Society of Dramatic Authors, the recipient of most of the honors that can be accorded to a French writer, M. Hervieu is held in the highest esteem by his contemporaries, and respected by the French people at large.

*Diogène-le-Chien*, Hervieu's first work, is called a novel; it is, however, a philosophical essay, something in the manner of the quietly ironical and gently cynical "novels" of Anatole France, who was, by the way, much pleased with the work. The book is characterized by that nervous, high-pressure and somewhat difficult style which is to be found in Hervieu's best work, plays as well as novels. *L'Armature* and *Peints par eux-mêmes* are among the finest of his works of fiction, and are particularly interesting as being illustrative of the good and bad qualities of all his writing. *L'Armature* is clear and unified, with a central figure round which moves a well-constructed and carefully managed story; in *Peints par eux-mêmes* the story is perhaps less unified, though moving and tense. Certain scenes in these novels have been cited as coming from the hand of a man who was a born dramatist. It is at least significant that M. Brioux has made a play out of *L'Armature*. Only one dramatic work of importance preceded these novels — *Les Paroles Restent* — and that

was scarcely indicative of the more mature work to come.

Although his novels have brought him a certain measure of fame, it is as a writer of plays that Hervieu is preëminently known. He and Brieux are the greatest living exponents of the "thesis" play; neither ever wrote a play without having some distinct and more or less immediate purpose in view. If this purpose was not the righting of a wrong, it was at least the illustration of some law of nature bearing directly upon a social abuse or "professional bias." Both writers are actuated by a desire to benefit mankind, either by pointing out the road to improvement or — as is more frequently the case — by showing the pitfalls on the road to evil. Hervieu, himself a lawyer, in some of his best plays attacks the law because he considers it in many respects unjust, unsuited to the varying needs of capricious men and women; Brieux attacks all authority because he is convinced that "in human hands it tends to become tyranny." As an artist, by reason of his distinctive style and more fastidious sense of form, Hervieu must be conceded the superior of Brieux, but Brieux is more human, brutally powerful, more personal and acrimonious — and consequently, at times perhaps, a little one-sided. But Brieux is on the whole just and logical (that is, if we accept his point of view), but the reticent and austere Hervieu has weighed his words well, and when he speaks we may be sure to have a fair statement. Perhaps this very passion for logical perfection in Hervieu lessens the value of his plays as human documents; certainly *La Course du Flambeau* is

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more like a mathematical theorem than a series of incidents from life molded into a harmonious whole. All Hervieu's plays are often criticised for their almost too perfect balance, and their consequent lack of the human element; and it cannot be denied that in the play just mentioned, and in *Les Tenailles* and *La Loi de l'homme*, Hervieu has overestimated the exigencies of his theme and assumed the rôle rather of scientific expositor than that of a critic of life. But in spite of an occasional too rigid adherence to the logic of his plot and a too great insistence on the formal precision of his ideas, Hervieu has accomplished more for the cause of his art than almost any other of his contemporaries. In Brunetière's Address on the Reception of Hervieu into the Académie Française, he states that the plays of the young writer marked an epoch in the theater of the day, bringing once more as they did true tragedy in modern guise to the contemporaneous stage. And it is for this reason, as well as because of the intrinsic value of the plays that Hervieu will be remembered. Not content merely with the depiction of character in action, or with the consideration of present-day problems, he has effected a return to the eternal struggles, having root in all mankind: between parent and child, love and duty, will-power and inclination. If he places his personages in a twentieth century environment and sets them contending with modern conditions, it is only that he may bring his audience into closer sympathy with him than if he were to adopt the conventional magnificence and pomp of classical tragedy. "Nowadays," says M. Hervieu, "we try to show

how the struggle for existence bears down inexorably upon those who are imprudent, too weak to defend themselves, those whose passions are stronger than their will to resist them." And by way of illustration of this statement he has written at least two plays that may fairly be accounted among the finest of modern tragedies: *Le Dédale* and *La Course du Flambeau*. In the former, the very essence of the tragedy is its inevitableness: in the heart of humanity is the love of parent for child, and the external forces that tend to interfere with this deeply-imbedded instinct are bound to fail. In the latter, the element of fate is no less predominant; here the love of mother for daughter drives a woman to kill her own mother. The play ends with the words: "For my daughter I have killed my mother."

Of the remaining plays, *Les Tenailles*, *L'Enigme*, *Le Réveil*, *Connais-toi* and *Bagatelle*, are the most important. *La Loi de l'homme* and *Les Paroles Restent* are early works of only relative merit; *Point de Lendemain*, merely an adaptation, *Théroigne de Méricourt*, a historical drama, and *Modestie*, a delightful one-act trifle. Considering the plays in chronological order, and omitting *Point de Lendemain*, we come first to *Les Paroles Restent*.

The choice of theme is significant: a man starts a slanderous story about a young woman. The story, it turns out later, is without foundation. He falls in love with the woman, and confesses that he was the instigator of the story, and she leaves him. There is a duel, the man is severely wounded and, just before he dies, he is made to

feel the terrible irony of circumstances, for he hears the last echo of his thoughtless gossip. Words remain! The impossibility of escaping the consequences of our deeds is a subject for true tragedy: it is a theme which Hervieu later worked out on a larger scale.

*Les Tenailles*, a more mature work, is the story of a woman who, having ceased to love her husband, tells him she is in love with another man and wishes to go away with him. The husband, who loves his wife as little as she does him, refuses to let her go; "the wife is prisoner to the husband." At the end of ten years, after the birth of a child, a dispute arises over his education. In the heat of the argument, the woman tells her husband that the child is not his, but hers by the man she formerly loved. The husband is now willing to grant his wife the divorce for which she asked ten years ago, but this time she refuses: she must have protection for herself and her child. She cannot leave now. "They must go hand in hand manacled to the end, let the nippers gall as they will. There is the child. Its future is at stake."—"We are only two wretched people," says the wife, "and misery knows only equals." A greater sureness of touch in the handling of the dialogue and particular scenes and a finer insight into character enter into the composition of this play than into the preceding.

*La Loi de l'homme* is an attack upon man-made laws; those articles in the code which accord the right to the father, and not to the mother, to consent to the marriage of the child, and that fail to place husband and wife upon an equal legal foot-

ing in the question of marital infidelity, are the butt of this acrimonious feminist play.

*L'Enigme* is chiefly interesting because it violates one of the "laws" of dramatic technique which was formerly supposed to be inviolable: never keep a secret from the audience. One of two sisters-in-law is unfaithful to her husband. Which? That is the enigma which is not solved until the close of the play. With the utmost skill the author contrives to keep his audience in suspense, and in this he succeeds, with the result, however, that the interest of the play lies almost entirely in the effort to solve the mystery which is, after all, of comparatively small importance.

*Théroigne de Méricourt*, Hervieu's only attempt in the field of historical drama, was highly successful; by reason of its character portrayal, its vividness and its power, its dignity, and the excellence of its literary style, it ranks as one of the best modern plays of its kind.

*Le Dédale* is, I am inclined to think, Hervieu's masterpiece. *Les Tenailles* can hardly claim the title: it is too bald; nor can *La Course du Flambeau*, which is too "sketchy." Both are marked by a brevity which is at times irritating, and a lack of the broad spirit of humanity which informs *Le Dédale*. This play contains at least two admirable and truly pathetic and tragic figures, Marianne and Guillaume, and the theme is allowed to develop through the agency of the unfortunate characters, and not according to the incorrigible demands of the dramatist.

Marianne is the divorced wife of Max de Pogis, by whom she has one young son. When the play



opens Marianne is on the point of acceding to the demands of Guillaume Le Breuil, a sincere and gallant suitor for her hand. There are but two possible obstacles to the union: Marianne's Catholic mother, for whom divorce does not exist, and Marianne's fear that her love for Guillaume is not so great as it should be. But she at length gives in. One day, after the marriage, Max's mother comes to Marianne to intercede in favor of her son, who wishes to have a voice in the education of his son; indeed, he demands "an equal share" of the child's time. Marianne at first rebels, but as the law is against her — in spite of the fact that she divorced Max on the ground of infidelity — and as she permits herself to be persuaded by her former husband in person, she consents to allow the boy to be taken, in company with Max and Madame de Pogis to their country estate for a few weeks. The third act brings us to the château where the little fellow has contracted diphtheria, and is now convalescing. Meantime Marianne has undergone a strange transformation: her constant association with the father of her child over the sick-bed has caused old memories to arise and before she knows it, she finds that she still loves Max. As she is about to leave for Paris to return to her husband, Max comes to her room.

MAX. This is what I want to tell you. I was once unfaithful to you, before we were separated; it hurt, it suffocated me. I should not have had the courage to continue much longer. If you hadn't found out my misconduct almost as soon as it began, I should very soon have

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stopped of my own accord. But I lost my head when the blow came. Instead of seeing myself as the only cause of trouble between us, I was angry with you for having found me out. I hated you because you forced me to recognize that I had committed a crime!

MARIANNE. [*Indignantly.*] You made *me* responsible! Me! You accused me! Me!

MAX. I am merely confessing. . . . I was ready to plunge into any abyss of iniquity when I felt the sting of your revenge. You insulted in public the woman who had wronged you; that killed her at once, socially, in our circle and in hers. . . . I was forced into that marriage: it was a kind of reparation for what I had done. And that is how, after my little fling, I was dragged on and on, regretting more and more that I lost you.

MARIANNE. When I first heard of your misconduct, you should have done everything to calm me, to regain my affection.

MAX. . . . Marianne, if I hadn't implicitly believed your protestations, if I had doubted, or tried harder to protect myself . . . could you have forgiven me?

MARIANNE. How can I tell? Who knows what might have happened at such a time? I was wild with grief, desperate — I threw myself on that sofa, as if I had been shot —

MAX. God, what I made you suffer!

MARIANNE. . . . The hours that night passed by while I lay in a trance . . .

MAX. . . . Marianne, Marianne, forgive me!

MARIANNE. . . . [*She bursts into sobs.*] . . .

MAX. Marianne! I was impulsive, hateful, but I have never loved any one but you! Every thought of love has been for you, for you alone!

MARIANNE. You lie! [*Coming back to reality.*] Leave me!

MAX. No, don't say that!

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MARIANNE. [*Going from him.*] You have carried me off my feet! I'm not well, I don't know what I'm saying! I'm not myself!

MAX. Oh, yes, you are just the same as you were the evening of our marriage, with your hair down that way, and your shoulders bare! You are trembling, you know what I want!

MARIANNE. You know I can be nothing to you! Leave me, pity me! Don't torture me!

MAX. No, Marianne, your grief is over. The only evil memory you had left has been buried in this room. . . . Even if I said nothing, you would still hear the echo of our kisses again —

MARIANNE. I don't want to hear —

MAX. Yes, yes, you do! Listen to the air vibrate with our love! Think of our dear child, of his hopes, of his very life, which first came into being in this very room!

MARIANNE. How could you leave me? Why did you do it? Why are you no longer my husband?

MAX. During these last days, when we protected our child from death, didn't you feel it was our very love that we were bringing back to life again?

MARIANNE. It's true, I couldn't resist the thought. Yes, I felt it!

MAX. Ah, I knew! In the supreme joy we experienced in the recovery of the boy, there came the rebirth of love to you and me. Don't struggle against it any longer. I am the father of your little one, the father who agonized with you for him, and fought with my whole soul. To-night, when we are no longer afraid, when we deserve happiness, the father is brought again to the mother! Take me! I adore you — oh, take me!

MARIANNE. [*Feebly resisting.*] I am yours!

But Marianne cannot return to Guillaume, nor can she live with Max, whom she loathes. Guillaume learns of her infidelity, and sets out to find Max.

The last act takes place on a high terrace, above a deep cataract of the Rhône. Max has been in the neighborhood for some time, trying to meet Marianne, and one evening he comes to the terrace. But Guillaume, intercepting the letter in which he tells of his coming, meets his rival. "There is a quick struggle. Under the weight of the men, the wooden railing gives way: Max and Guillaume fall down into the chasm. The voice of Marianne is heard in the distance. . . . Little Louis, for whom the mother is looking, runs in. 'Come here, my life! My love! . . .'" Along the edge of the precipice, below which are the vast silence and the peace of death, the mother takes the child toward the house where he, in his turn, will grow into manhood and work out his destiny."

In no other play has Hervieu attained and preserved so great a height of sympathetic and passionate emotional power, nor exposed the relentless working-out of human motives struggling with forces greater than they; nowhere else has he sustained his interest and developed his story simultaneously, with so sure a hand. Faults the play has, faults of style and faults of technique, while the dénouement has often been severely censured. Hervieu himself once said: "I have always avoided arbitrary endings (the punishment of vice and the reward of virtue) and opportune deaths, whereby in the last act those who are in the way are fortunately disposed of." After this affirmation, it is impossible to conceive Hervieu's so contradicting himself as to use the suicide-murder of Max and Guillaume as a facile expedient to rid

himself of "those who are in the way." His reasons must have lain deeper. Consider Marianne's position: if she dies, the child remains, and also the two husbands; if Guillaume dies, she is at the mercy of Max, against whom her innate modesty rebels; if Max dies, it must be by Guillaume's hand — but then Guillaume would remain, with his crime and Marianne's infidelity to keep the two apart. What remains? Both must die, for the good of Marianne and for the good of the child. This is therefore the natural, the inevitable solution. Yet somehow it seems unsatisfactory, especially, as M. Adolphe Brisson — the critic of the *Temps* — points out, as the catastrophe is dependent upon Guillaume's superior strength, for what if Max had been the stronger? This is a serious criticism, but as the solution is a just one, the means employed to that end are of comparative insignificance. The play as a whole is gripping, vital, true; it is, in Mr. Huneker's words, "a great section of throbbing, real life."

*Le Réveil* is the most abstract and "intellectual" of the plays. The theme is a subtle one for dramatic use: "There are certain crises in our lives," says Antoine Benoist, "when it may be said that we are no longer ourselves; carried away either by enthusiasm or by a great wave of passion, we are capable of performing acts — good or evil — that before or after, appear to us utterly out of keeping with our character. Such are the sudden and violent crises that ordinarily serve as subjects for the writer of dramas and tragedies. But suppose that the moment before the catastrophe, when two lovers are about to ruin

their lives, a sudden light illumines the abyss yawning at their feet." Here is the "awakening" which the author treats of in *Le Réveil*. The woman who is willing to leave husband and child for the man she loves suddenly sees the full extent and import of the crime she is about to commit, and tells her lover: "No, I am no longer the woman to whom you were everything. I thought you were dead, and I saw that I must continue to live, if not for myself, at least for my husband and my child."

*Connais-toi* marks a return to the earlier choice of theme: man is feeble, for he does not know himself; has he therefore the right to judge others? As in *La Course du Flambeau* the central idea is epitomized in the final speech of the play; in this case: "Who knows himself?" General de Sibéran, a man of the strictest principles, infallible in his own estimation in questions of honor and morality, believes that a guest in his home is carrying on a clandestine love affair with another of his guests, Madame Doncières; he insists that the lieutenant leave at once. But it is not long before he learns that his own son is the offender; the son is not however sent away. Doncières, the woman's husband, asks the General's advice, and determines to divorce his wife. After Doncières leaves, the General surprises his own wife in the arms of the lieutenant. The blow paralyzes him, and he can only forgive and ask, "Who knows himself?"

*Bagatelle* shows greater flexibility than any of the preceding plays. It appears that the author, weary of that careful planning and precision which



characterized such works as *Les Tenailles* and *La Course du Flambeau*, wished to write a comedy of manners, and in a more leisurely fashion elaborate characters for their own sake. The curious point about this play is that it is made up of interesting and picturesque fragments; the theme is neither very clear nor convincing. A number of couples play at love — “*Bagatelle*” — some are scorched, but they are assured that time heals all wounds. *Bagatelle* is fuller of promise of a new manner than an actual achievement. It stands in relation to Hervieu’s works much as does Brieux’s *Le Bourgeois aux champs*, indicating that the author is not too old to change, and change for the better.

The latest play is *Le Destin est Maître*, a tragedy in two acts. It was first produced — in a translation by the spirituel Benavente — in Madrid, during the season of 1914. Not many weeks later, it was seen — together with Flers and Cailavet’s *Monsieur Bretonneau* — in Paris, on the boards of the Porte Saint-Martin. *Le Destin est Maître* — the very title is unmistakably Hervieuesque — is a swift-moving and compact play. The first act — it comprises but two — reveals to us the faithful and high-minded Juliane Béreuil, whose husband, at the time away from home, is about to come to trial on a charge of embezzlement. Juliane’s brother, Séverin, attempts to regulate matters, and save if possible the honor of the family. Gaëtan, the husband, comes from Paris in order to obtain the funds necessary for his escape from the country; but his brother will not permit him this easy method of escape: he must face the music or kill himself. There is a ter-

rible scene between the two; then Séverin shoots his brother-in-law. Juliane, who has been absent meanwhile, praying in a nearby church, learns the truth from her brother. But the brother, unable to remain longer in the presence of the woman and her children whom his sense of honor has so sorely stricken, gives up his rank in the army, and goes to join the Foreign Legion.

The play is too summary, it smacks a little too much of the *Les Tenailles* rigidity; it is certainly no advance upon that early play. *Bagatelle* gave hopes of a new manner, a brighter mood.

## HENRI LAVEDAN

HENRI LAVEDAN is a painter of contemporary manners with an extraordinary endowment of that quality, very difficult to define, which the French call *esprit*. He is also something of a moralist.

Alfred Capus is a painter of manners, but he rarely digs beneath the surface of things. Half a dozen French dramatists of the day possess keen senses of humor at least the equal of that of Lavedan. And Brioux is certainly a moralist. Yet Lavedan resembles none of his contemporaries. Perhaps this isolation is partly the result of his birth and early education. A born bourgeois as to class, he lived in a family where "the highest ideals and the strictest sense of what was fitting were of long and traditional standing." Add to this, a good education, with few obstacles to be overcome, and we find the youthful Lavedan in a position to see the life of his time in a clear and steady light. Capus, by reason of his comparatively narrow education, Brioux, because of his preoccupation with social questions, and also of his birth and breeding, Donnay, warped a little by too close application to the erotic — all lack the outlook of their more fortunate confrère. With equal sureness of touch and sympathy he can show us the intimate life of the full-blooded aristocrat (*Le Prince d'Aurec*), and the unfortunate little

bourgeoise music-teacher (*Catherine*); he can enter into the sentiments of the "viveur," and then turn round and condemn him with all the imprecations of an enraged Brioux (*Le Marquis de Priola*). Where Hervieu sketches a shadow, a lay-figure, Lavedan paints a portrait; where Brioux criticizes a condition of affairs, Lavedan makes a living story of it. But Lavedan has distinct limitations; for if little Catherine is well-drawn and sympathetic, she is, we feel, too good to be true. If *Le Duel* be a supremely skillful piece of technique and an interesting psychological study, its end is weak and unconvincing.

Lavedan is an unequal writer; his occasional shortcomings are probably more noticeable than those of most of his fellow-writers. It seems that he has never been quite sure as to what style of work he was best fitted. About twenty years after the production of his first play, he was still searching for new ways of presenting his material. Character-drawing is his supreme gift. When we think of the bulk of his work, we forget the weak plots of some of the plays, the faulty technique of many of them, and think only of the three or four commanding figures for which he will long be remembered: *Le Prince d'Aurec*, *Le Marquis de Priola*, and *Paul Costard*.

A few lines will suffice to render a brief account of the life of Lavedan. Born at Orléans in 1859, he was sent first to a small seminary not far from his native town, then to the Lycée Louis-le-Grand and the Institution Bossuet at Paris, and later to Jesuit schools at Nantes and Poitiers. He returned to Paris from the provinces to finish his

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studies, when the War of 1870 broke out. Henri's father placed the youth in the hands of the priests, with whom Henri remained during the terrible siege and the Commune. At the end of those troublous times, he was graduated, and immediately agreed to the wishes of his parents, who had determined to make a lawyer of him; but one year of law was so disagreeable, that upon passing his examinations, he refused to continue to work for a profession which was obviously so little in accordance with his inclination and ability.

At this period, for the first time, Lavedan began to experience some of the hardships of life in Paris which are usually the lot of young men without a profession. He was not long, however, in making a way for himself in the field in which he was destined to succeed.

Among his first literary efforts were numerous little dialogues — of a type which he has continued to write to this day —: diminutive *quarts d'heure*, which made their appearance from time to time in newspapers and magazines. But printed dialogues hardly make a dramatist. One day he showed some of these trifles to the ever-ready and enterprising Antoine, who produced them at his Théâtre Libre, to the horror of many members of the critical world, who considered the little "scènes" as decadent tag-ends of plays. Lavedan himself realized that they were not very ambitious efforts, and set to work on a serious long play, *Une Famille*, which had the good luck to be accepted by the Comédie Française and played in 1891. The play is not a significant one, except that it proved that Lavedan was able to con-

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struct a full-length play and hold the interest of the audience. Yet the "dialogue" style was still to be observed in this larger fabric; *Une Famille* was in reality a cleverly strung series of conversations. It may be well to look into one or two of these trifles, for they give evidence of some of the chief qualities of the writer: observation of details, and skill in dialogue.

Paul and his sister Françoise meet early one morning; she is coming home from the ball, he from the club. Paul has lost a good deal of money, while she has been "fearfully bored." He tells his sister that if she fails to appreciate the men she meets at dances she may lose her chance of marrying.

FRANÇOISE. I tell you, I despise the whole lot!

PAUL. Of course, but that is no reason for not marrying one of them.

FRANÇOISE. Think so?

PAUL. Lord! — Of course! Take the least impossible one. He'll improve with age, settle down, and in a year or a year and a half, when he'll be merely a father to you, well, you'll have a very nice, respectable little husband.

FRANÇOISE. I tell you, I have other ideas on the question of marriage. Mine will be a marriage of inclination — pleasure.

PAUL. Impossible! I've given the matter more thought than you may perhaps imagine, and I have come to this profound conclusion, little girl: that all necessary things — like getting born, and eating, and loving — it's all a pose, a nasty pose. People try to make it attractive, put seasoning into it — but —! It's dressed up and set to music, but the sauces don't last forever: you've got to swallow the terrible fish. Marriage is one of the fish, just



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like birth and death — . . . A gay life we lead, we must admit! And we look the part! You're green, little sister!

FRANÇOISE. And you violet!

PAUL. It's the dawn that makes us look like that.

FRANÇOISE. The dawn and all the rest of it. Our faces only reflect our souls — that's the truth of the matter.

PAUL. Our souls? Our souls?

FRANÇOISE. Don't you believe in the soul?

PAUL. Yes, little sister, when I'm sick, otherwise —

FRANÇOISE. What?

PAUL. Nothing. I believe that we are put into the world to go through a number of motions which are always the same; which must be gone through at the same time — and then we all fade away —

In *Every Evening* (*Scène de tous les soirs*) three clubmen are gathered together at two in the morning, and inquire what they can do to kill time.

VOUVANS. Well, what are we doing now?

D'ARGENTAY. Yes, what? . . .

COUTRAS. We're living: this is life.

VOUVANS. We've been doing the same thing together for the past twelve years.

D'ARGENTAY. And we're not tired of it. Curious!

VOUVANS. But most curious of all is to think that in twenty years' time we shall be just as amused by this as we are now — perhaps more.

D'ARGENTAY. Very possibly. I remember, I once met a poor girl in the street, pale, sickly-looking. I said to her, "You must be tired of it all, aren't you?" She said with a smile, "No, I rather like it; I get used to it from day to day."

VOUVANS. Well — what are we doing?

D'ARGENTAY. Something very Parisian: we're smoking. Voilà!

Here is Lavedan the moralist. Where Capus observes life and passes by without comment, Lavedan points a lesson; Capus laughs with or at his wastrels and "flâneurs," Lavedan allows them to drop remarks revealing tragic depths. The little conversation between Paul and Françoise is a case in question. Lavedan delights in showing us the boulevardier, the clubman, the Don Juan, the fop; but he rarely fails to show both sides of his character. In the plays these sketches become expanded, the portraits are more detailed. The plot, in nearly every case, serves largely as framework; character is of supreme importance.

*Le Nouveau Jeu* is probably the most amusing play Lavedan ever wrote. In it, that type of boulevardier who tries at all costs to appear original is crystallized; his *argot*, his antics, his good and bad qualities are set before us with a versimilitude which this dramatist never surpassed. Paul Costard, the principal character of the piece, is at the theater one evening in company with his mistress, and declares that unless she behaves herself and allows him to direct his opera-glasses in whatever part of the house he pleases, he will obtain an introduction to the young girl whom he has been observing in a nearby box, and marry her. Bobette dares him; he takes the dare, leaves her abruptly, gets the introduction to the young lady, and before long is allowed by her parents to become an "accepted" suitor. It so happens that Alice Labosse herself is something of an "original." When her mother tells her that Costard wishes to marry her, she replies that the whole matter leaves her indifferent.

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MME. LABOSSE. You don't mean to tell me that it makes no difference to you whether you marry the first-comer or not?

ALICE. Absolutely none!

MME. LABOSSE. Old or young, hideous or handsome, rich or poor — it's all the same to you?

ALICE. The same? No. But I have no desire for one any more than for the other. I tell you, Mamma, it's of no importance. I accept everything that each day brings me: good and bad together. Don't worry me now; be nice.

MME. LABOSSE. It's perfectly monstrous! Think of having a disposition like yours, my child! Only eighteen years old, too. You are laying up trouble for yourself —

ALICE. Perhaps.

MME. LABOSSE. And you don't care at all?

ALICE. No, it makes no difference to me.

Costard marries her — and a week later returns to Bobette. Then begins the intrigue. It is not very new, and not at all respectable. Alice loses no time in finding a lover; Costard is discovered under embarrassing circumstances, but before long Alice takes revenge, and is found in a no less embarrassing situation. The play must be taken in that spirit of aloof unreality which Lamb urged we should have to assume when seeing the artificial comedies of the English Restoration; in that sense, *Le Nouveau Jeu* is the best of comedy, but if we take facts for facts, it is a dismal tragedy. At the last, Costard and Alice, equally guilty, are called before the tribunal and severely censured by the judge. After the moral and sententious "lecture," Costard replies:

I freely admit everything, Monsieur. It is life, simple every-day life. It is life to get married and regret it; to

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endeavor to escape from the bonds of holy matrimony, to be caught, to desert house and family, and then go the limit. . . .

JUDGE. Do you not regret having destroyed the happiness of your wife?

COSTARD. Not in the least. She could never have been happy with me. I'm good for everything in the world except marriage.

JUDGE. Then you had no business marrying.

COSTARD. How was I to know? It's just like spinach: in order to dislike it, you must first taste it —

*Le Nouveau Jeu* is hardly more than a series of episodes, but with what unerring skill are they contrived! They are more than comments on certain sections of life; they are definite and truthful pictures, full of verve, throbbing with vitality. Their morality cannot well be called into question: Lavedan paints what he sees. He is a remarkably clever bystander.

Since the fall of the last Monarchy in France in 1871, and indeed ever since the Revolution, the aristocracy has never quite found its proper position in the state. It was forced either to participate in the government and thereby relinquish much of its former prestige, or remain apart and preserve the tradition of culture and gentility which had for so many centuries been in its sole keeping. The indomitable pride, the arrogant superiority, the consciousness of the divine right of nobility, the pathos of the dying out of the Ancien Régime, Lavedan centered in his finest character creation: *Le Prince d'Aurec*. The entire play is concerned with this suave aristocrat; the plot — such as it is — and the minor personages, serve

but to throw into relief the insufferable but somehow sympathetic snob. By reason of his birth, the Prince believes that he has but to "invent a clever saying — a perfume, a shade — set it in circulation; a new cravat, a distinctive hat, discover a new method of riding, render a vice as attractive as the ridicule of virtue; revolt against the vulgar diamond of the Jew, the bronze *objets d'art* of the bourgeois, the hardware of the Peruvian! That is the only occupation worthy a gentleman nowadays! If he borrows money from De Horn, he is under no obligation, he believes, to pay it back: *Noblesse oblige!* Has he not allowed De Horn to sit at his table, De Horn, a Jew and a bourgeois! Has he not condescended to be seen in public with him, even driven his carriages? And does the Jew then ask for his cursed money? This attitude is a little difficult to understand; but it must be remembered that the Prince had been educated with the idea that his family had from the days of the Crusades been one of the most important and influential in France, that because of its accomplishments, to it was ever due the respect of every succeeding generation of Frenchmen, be they Royalists or Republicans. Yet the Prince plays a losing game: he lives in a Republic, where justice is done. De Horn will have his money. The Duchess pays the Jew, who disappears; the Prince bows down momentarily to his fate, but his last words redeem him; right or wrong, he is a noble to the end. "To-day I can swear to do only one thing: live like an honest man, and when the time comes, die like a prince." We may doubt whether he will live as he says, but we are positive

that he means to die like a prince. "In war?" asks his mother. "Will you die in battle?" Montade the novelist answers that that is no more than any of us would do, and the Prince replies with incomparable hauteur — like one of his Crusader forefathers — "Il y a la manière!" All of France might die for her on the field of battle, but *he* will die in his own particular "manner!" The line is worthy Cyrano's "Ma panache!"

*Viveurs!* is a series of interesting *genre* scenes; it contains little that cannot be found later and better developed, in three or four of the more important plays. *Catherine* is one of those rare comedies in contemporary French drama which can with impunity be presented by young ladies' boarding schools. Although it could scarcely be termed insipid, the studied avoidance of anything unpleasant in subject-matter or treatment, the inherent goodness of the heroine, leave us with the impression that the author was either totally uninspired or else that he wished to write a play which could give no possible offense.

Nothing could be more different than *Le Marquis de Priola*. That play, together with *Le Duel*, is, among Lavedan's later plays, the most significant. Add to these *Le Prince d'Aurec* and *Le Nouveau Jeu*, and we have the best and most representative plays of the author.

*Le Marquis de Priola* is the most pointedly moral of any of the plays. Don Juan has always been an attractive figure; but among his many interpreters he has found none to draw so poignant a lesson from his famous escapades. The sinister



Marquis (played by the incomparable Le Bargy at the Comédie Française) is the irresistible seducer, the arch-demon whose fierce onslaughts have as yet never failed to attain their desired end. "I am a dilettante," he says, "a collector who avidly looks on at the spectacle of the hesitations, troubles, fevers and agonies of the feminine heart. It is a divine comedy: I see women laugh, cry, suffer, lie. . . . This is an exquisite joy to me — always provided that those smiles, kisses, tears, are brilliantly executed: they must be things of beauty." To his protégé Pierre Morain, a young man whom he has had the apparent decency to adopt, he says: "Don't believe in women, they will believe in you. Domineer over them. Never fall in love: you will burn your fingers if you do. Never for a second admit to yourself that they are of the slightest importance, that they can influence your destiny by the weight of a single hair. Fear no woman, believe no woman, above all, those who say they are honest; they are the worst of all." At an embassy ball in Paris the Marquis' divorced wife, since remarried, catches sight of her former husband, and immediately realizes that his hold on her is as strong as ever. Afraid of herself, she confides in her puritanical friend, Mme. de Savières, who consents to remonstrate with the Marquis. But with consummate skill the Marquis, who knows how to deal with puritans, nearly achieves the conquest of the envoy; indeed, Mme. de Chesne, Priola's former wife, intervenes just in time to save her friend. The idea of making violent love to Mme. de Chesne has taken hold of the Marquis. But Thérèse de Valleroy has mean-

time promised to come to the Marquis' home to see "the famous collection of almanacs." Priola's preoccupation with Mme. de Chesne leads him to insult Thérèse and cruelly wound her pride. He plays with her a few minutes, and then sends her home, saying to her as she leaves: "Let us be more than lovers: let us be friends!" Now there is one obstacle to the reconquering of Mme. de Chesne: Pierre Morvain. The young man, revolted by the cruelty of his "guardian," begs him not to persecute the poor woman. The conflict gives rise to a superb scene, which results in Pierre's declaration that he will live no longer with his guardian. Mme. de Chesne, receiving an old letter calculated to arouse in her the sensations and memories of her first love for the Marquis, is ready to give in to him, but her virtuous friend Mme. de Savières suggests that she test the fidelity of the lover. If, as he says, he is really in love with his former wife, he will not make love to her, Mme. de Savières. But again the puritanical woman comes near succumbing to the diabolic wooing of Don Juan. Pierre, who has been clearing out the Marquis' desk and rearranging old letters and papers, comes across a photograph of his mother: the truth then flashes over him — the dishonor of his father's "accidental" death — and he decides on revenge. The next day he confronts his guardian with the photograph. "I ought to kill you, but it is not worth my while to do so: your death is not far off. I shall let you go." "What do you mean?" asks the Marquis. "That the life you have been leading is beginning to tell on you; you haven't long to live."

The Marquis, overcome with rage and fear, tells Pierre that he is his own son, then falls, stricken with apoplexy. Mme. de Savières' husband, a doctor, is present. After ausculting the Marquis, he says: "Acute ataxia. In six months he will be blind and completely paralyzed."—"Will he keep his reason?"—"Yes. He may last twenty years."—"How horrible!" says Mme. de Savières. "And who will take care of him?"—Pierre replies: "I."

Why is it that in the realm of modern drama so many writers have in their first few efforts produced their best work, their most lasting plays? Sudermann, Max Halbe, Donnay; to a certain extent Hauptmann, Lemaître, and now Lavedan, appear to have reached their highest point of development during their first eight or ten years of activity. Without trying to delve too deep into the reasons, we may at least note that many of these dramatists were at first content merely to draw characters and not to comment at any great length upon them; to paint, not to explain. Lavedan painted a great portrait in *Le Prince d'Aurec*; in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Rostand did the same thing. In *Le Marquis de Priola*, Lavedan attempted, with a good deal of success, to explain motives and point a moral; in *Chantecler*, Rostand went to the very depths of his hero's character, with remarkable success. What Rostand will do in the future remains to be seen; what Lavedan will do — well, he seems to have done. And his latest plays cause us to regret his defection from the early manner. With advancing years, that philosophical *penchant* which is innate in French-

men has got the upper hand with Lavedan. In *Le Marquis de Priola* he went as far as an artist can safely go; but with *Le Duel* he went a step beyond. In *Le Goût du Vice*, in spite of occasional flashes reminiscent of the days of *Le Nouveau Jeu*, he is so pointedly moral that we begin to feel that we are being preached at.

*Le Duel* is concerned with the struggle of two brothers, for a woman. Doctor Morey, a well-known alienist, a freethinker and atheist, and the Abbé Daniel, a devout priest, are the brothers in question. The Duke de Chailles is a degenerate morphine-fiend, under treatment at the Doctor's sanatorium. He has only a few months to live. The Duchess, coming regularly to see her husband, has been attracted by the Doctor, who in turn is drawn toward the charming woman, whose ideas he feels are so well in accord with his own. Daniel, whom the Doctor has not seen for ten years — their incompatible ideas have kept them apart — comes to ask him to assist in the founding of a dispensary. If Henri refuses to lend his support, perhaps his rich friend the Duchess will undertake to endow it? The duel begins when Henri allows Daniel to speak to her "on condition that she is not to know I am your brother." The thesis of the play is at once made clear, as Daniel says: "You struggle against disease, I against passion; you save the body, I the soul. Why, at this moment I have among my penitents a woman . . . whose name I do not know, whose face I have never seen. . . . She is unhappily married, and she loves a man who is not her husband. A dozen times she was on the point of revealing her love

to him . . . a dozen times she came to my confessional for power to resist. Each time she received that power, and overcame temptation. . . ." Of course, the unknown is the Duchess. From this point on, the play becomes a series of scenes, between the Duchess and Daniel, and between the Duchess and Henri. When she is with the former, she is ready to take the veil, when with the latter, she is ready to give in to him. The deadlock is finally broken by the news that the Duke, in a fit of madness, has thrown himself from the window, and will doubtless die within a few hours. Meantime, a strange metamorphosis has taken place in the mind of Daniel. Together with Henri and the Duchess he has gone to the Bishop for advice: he cannot let his brother marry the Duchess. His soul has been in the struggle, and he is jealous of his brother's victory. But when it is learned that the Duke is dead, and after thinking over the Bishop's advice, he conquers his personal feelings, and bids the Duchess marry Henri, saying that it is her duty to become a wife and a mother. Too deeply humiliated by his defeat, he will leave for the Orient in company with the Bishop. Henri then takes the Duchess into his arms.

The idea is excellent, the dialogue concise and swift, and the struggle as clearly defined as a Hervieu could ask for. But after all, we may well ask, what of it? The knot is cut just at the critical point. Opportune deaths, the recognition of long-lost fathers, and convenient marriages, are all very well for conventional comedies; but where the problem is of so great importance as Lavedan

would lead us to believe it is in *Le Duel*, we can accept no such facile dénouement. Certainly, the Duke was likely to kill himself at any time; but his doing so just when the Duchess would have to decide her own fate, ruins the thesis set before us. The Duchess is being continually swayed between two strong wills, which correspond with two selves within her, but when the *Deus ex machina* steps in, she is allowed to escape. At the end of the play, she is no different from what she was as the curtain rose on the first act. The Duchess therefore ceases to interest us. Daniel, near the close of the play, begins to interest us only as he decides to depart for the Far East.

Since *Le Duel* Lavedan appears to be searching round for new subjects. The aristocracy and the boulevard still possess charms for him, while the history of France, and the question of war, cause him to hover about the haunts of his first successes. *Sire* is a romantic play with a historical background. A young man pretends that he is the lost Louis XVII, and convinces a half-crazy countess that he is really the son of Louis XVI. Through five acts of conventional intrigue, the Figaro-like Roulette manages to hold the interest.

“In *Le Goût du Vice*,” says Lavedan, “I have tried to change my manner; I have done my best to transform myself, simply to give variety to my work. Those who have seen *Sire*, *Le Marquis de Priola*, and *Le Duel* will notice this, and judge whether or no I have succeeded.” Yes, he has changed his manner; and we regret it, we who have seen the plays he mentions!



The latest play<sup>1</sup> is *Servir* (1912). A considerable departure from all the preceding "manners" of the author, it is certainly his best work since *Le Duel*. This is the story of a father who is a born soldier, but who has been forced to remain a civilian, and his son, who is an officer, but whose scruples of conscience are radically opposed to the "profession." This son has discovered an explosive many times more powerful than any heretofore known, but refuses to reveal the secret for the service of the *Patrie*. The father, driven by his innate desire to serve — a desire, the author is careful to tell us, to engage in war as such, not primarily in the interest of his country — spies on his son and discovers the secret. The big scene is the struggle between father and son, with the mother between them. The father tears the buttons from the son's uniform, saying that he is unworthy his position as an officer. The mother, sympathizing with her child, interferes and attempts to kill herself. This brings the men to their senses. Then the father tells them that he has been commissioned by the government to prevent the mobilization of the enemy's army in Morocco, and lets them know further than another son, a soldier in Morocco, has been murdered by that enemy which is now about to make war on France. The sense of personal injury then turns the tables: mother, father, son, are actuated by a desire for vengeance, and they all welcome the boom of the cannon announcing the declaration of war.

<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing, but *Pétard* was produced in the Spring of 1914.

The family struggle and its relation to national affairs,— the main idea of the play,— is very skillfully and interestingly developed. Yet the son as a French officer is hard to accept. How could such a man think as he thinks, and still remain an officer? Again Lavedan has strained a point in order that his thesis might be worked out.

When an author begins his career and wins his greatest successes in one kind of work, we are loath to see him venture far afield. Often he does this at his peril. Lavedan is at his best in pure character-drawing, like *Le Prince d'Aurec*; in other fields he has done sincere and good work, but in those other fields there is lacking that sure touch, that evenness which he once taught us to expect. He may still do significant work, he could hardly do otherwise, but—" Il y a la manière! "

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“ A PLAY is a love story, and since that story is laid in various places, we are led to believe that plays differ.”

These words of Maurice Donnay are the quintessence of his theory of the theater. To him life is a spectacle from which the love element must be extracted and molded into an art form, and that form he has once for all fixed in his finest and best-known play, *Amants*. Love, within or without the marriage bond, and sex attraction, these are the eternal realities for the poetic and delicate Parisian whose plays remain the delight of Tout-Paris.

*Amants* opens at the home of Claudine Rozay, a retired actress, who is entertaining a number of children at a party for her own daughter. “ Of the correct and elegant mothers who have brought children, not one is married; each of them, like their own hostess, is comfortably established in a *liaison* which assures her, together with luxuries, a sort of outward respectability, and permits her to associate with ‘ society.’ ” Georges Vétheuil is a guest at this gathering; he has come to visit the hostess, whom he once casually met, and has asked to be permitted to further the acquaintance. In an artfully conducted scene, Claudine gives in to Georges’ overtures, and consents to become his

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mistress. The Count de Ruyseux, Claudine's "legitimate" lover, the father of Claudine's little daughter, then enters, and the unsuspecting count meets for the first time his new rival. After Georges leaves, Claudine gives bent to her feelings in true Donnayesque fashion:

CLAUDINE. What's the news?

COUNT. Nothing much.

CLAUDINE. Tell me what there is! No gossip? See any one?

COUNT. Oh, yes: met Lagny.

CLAUDINE. Ah, what did he have to say?

COUNT. Nothing — since he stopped paying attention to my wife, he cuts me dead.

CLAUDINE. Really!

COUNT. Or rather, since he has dropped out of the number of those who pay attention to my wife!

CLAUDINE. Please, Alfred, you know how I detest hearing you say such things!

COUNT. Why so? I'm not at all bitter.

CLAUDINE. Of course: you're a philosopher!

COUNT. I'm not a philosopher; only, as every one in Paris knows of my wife's conduct, my assumed ignorance of the fact would be childish, and might even give rise to graver suspicions; to brag of it would be odious in the extreme; but to mention it before certain picked individuals, like you, and in a light and graceful manner — that's the only decent way for a man who knows well the exigencies of life. I think there's a splendid place to fill between Georges Dandin and Othello.

Meantime, Claudine has been living with Vétheuil, but of this Ruyseux knows nothing. One night Ruyseux and Vétheuil dine at Claudine's, and Ruyseux bids her good-by: he is leaving for

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Naples. This is the chance the lovers have been awaiting, and they determine to take advantage of the other's absence and spend the time at Fontainebleau. Claudine and her new lover, having spent some months together, come to the inevitable breaking-off, and the woman gives vent to her pent-up jealousy. Rather illogically Vétueil says he wants his liberty; he is dissatisfied with their "false position," he says. Soon after, Claudine — sorry for her precipitancy in the scene in question — comes to him and implores him to forgive her, but he refuses, recognizing the fact that because of Claudine's daughter and Ruyseux they cannot be all to each other that he could wish. He cannot for the moment see her point of view. But this attitude is only temporary, for he cannot long remain obdurate in the face of the manifold charms of his former mistress. Somewhat afraid of himself once more, he resolves to go away, and break off their idyllic union at its height, in Italy. She has come to know that they are not eternal lovers, and wishes to preserve the memory of their past. Her daughter, too, will in the future demand more of Claudine's time and attention. In the fourth act they part.

VÉTUEIL. Now, Claudine, please, not that! You're breaking my heart. Suppose, now, I do stay, could we live again that Paris life, having the same obstacles to overcome as before? With those same scenes over and over again? They would wear us out, bore us infinitely. You know very well, they would begin again the day we returned, and we know that they are simply the result of the conditions under which we try to live, under which we first met. Good Heavens, how often have we tried to be

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happy in spite of everything! And we were never able — we shouldn't be now if we tried again: we'd only end by hating each other, perhaps deceiving each other.

CLAUDINE. Oh, no, no!

VÉTHEUIL. Is that sort of existence possible? No, it would be a living hell, it would be the worst sort of life, especially after these weeks we've passed together, alone, so alone! We have been too happy, and we cannot find greater happiness; we've had a month of happiness which nothing can ever efface —

CLAUDINE. If it weren't for the idea of our separating —

VÉTHEUIL. Yes, but that thought kept our happiness in bounds, prevented it from becoming a sort of insolent madness, gave it a tinge of melancholy. It was like the evening mist that enshrouds the mountains, softens their hard outlines, and makes their enormous mass things of infinite tenderness.

. . . . .

CLAUDINE. Then — this is the end — of everything —?

VÉTHEUIL. Listen, Claudine, let me tell you, let me —

CLAUDINE. What can you say to me? Something reasonable again? Don't you *feel* anything?

VÉTHEUIL. Claudine, that's not kind — If you only knew! I'm all broken up, too; I have a steep Calvary as well as you, but I say this must be, it must! It must!

CLAUDINE. Then I'll never see you again —!

VÉTHEUIL. Of course you will — I'll come back, later, after we're both cured.

CLAUDINE. Do you believe we shall be?

VÉTHEUIL. Yes, we shall. I'm not leaving you because you have deceived me, and you're not leaving me for the same reason, nor are we tired of each other. There are none of the conventional lies between us, nor the usual infamous tricks to envenom our love and wound



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us incurably: we are breaking off because you have your daughter and your friend, and we cannot be happy with those obstacles to overcome. We are saying good-by, but in what a marvelously beautiful land!

Vétheuil's carriage is ready, and the pair must separate.

COACHMAN. Excellency, it is ten-fifteen; we have just time to reach Locarno for the eleven o'clock train.

VÉTHEUIL. I'm coming immediately.

CLAUDINE. What did he say?

VÉTHEUIL. That it is ten-fifteen, and I had only time to be at Locarno at eleven.

CLAUDINE. Well — adieu! [*A long kiss.*] Let me look at you, Georges, Georges — you seem like a dying man! Go! Go! Don't say anything more to me! [*She falls on a bench, her head bowed low, and sobs. The bells of the carriage are heard tinkling in the distance, then are heard no more. And thus ends the fourth act.*]

Eighteen months later Georges, who has been on an exploring party in the desert, returns and meets Claudine at a reception in Paris. It is as he had predicted: the intense fire of their passion has given way to quiet affection.

CLAUDINE. And now what are you going to do, here in Paris? You will be very much in demand; you will be fêted and asked everywhere; think of it, an explorer!

VÉTHEUIL. I've given up all that; you see, when one has lived eighteen months as I have, this Parisian life is no longer possible. . . . No, I'm going away again, I'm going to help colonize.

CLAUDINE. You're right, but it won't be very pleasant for you out there, all alone.

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VÉTHEUIL. I shan't be all alone: I'm going to get married — she's the sister of one of my comrades on this expedition!

CLAUDINE. What? Why, you've hardly been back a week! You've made a very quick decision, haven't you?

VÉTHEUIL. I've known her for more than a month. When we were returning to France, she joined us at Saïgon, and we came back together on the same boat.

CLAUDINE. Is she pretty?

VÉTHEUIL. Not so pretty as you.

CLAUDINE. Don't say that: in a few weeks you'll think her the prettiest of women. By the way, you must have a photograph of her with you?

VÉTHEUIL. I have.

CLAUDINE. Then show it to me. [*He shows her the photograph.*] You are right, she's not pretty, but she looks energetic and sweet. You see, dear, I don't feel at all jealous, looking at this picture, and if ever I meet the original, I shall kiss her with all my heart.

VÉTHEUIL. How good you are!

CLAUDINE. Life is funny; when I think how for months I never did anything but cry and think about you! . . . And now here you are telling me you are going to marry, and I have perfect control of myself, and am even glad to hear the news! . . .

VÉTHEUIL. What an adorable woman you are!

CLAUDINE. Of course! But then, I'm cured, you see!

VÉTHEUIL. Yes, and all that had to be. . . .

CLAUDINE. It was a real duty, and that's a great consolation — the only consolation, I think. [*A pause.*] Well, I too, am going to marry.

VÉTHEUIL. Really?

CLAUDINE. Yes: a great many things have happened since you have been away.

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VÉTHEUIL. I can well imagine.

CLAUDINE. The Countess de Ruysieux ran away with an officer a few weeks ago.

VÉTHEUIL. No?

CLAUDINE. Yes! Now Ruysieux considers himself free. . . . We're going to live in the country, on our estate, far from the city; we'll come to Paris only when Denise is eighteen.

VÉTHEUIL. Well then, it's a pretty play: ends with two marriages.

CLAUDINE. Yes, but shall we be happy?

VÉTHEUIL. That's another story. . . . If we remained here in this city of trouble and suggestiveness, we who are the playthings of passion, we should again be tempted to have an adventure before the flame flickered for the last time. Towards forty, you would fall in love with a youth who would cause you great suffering, and finally break your heart —

CLAUDINE. Don't say that!

VÉTHEUIL. And I, toward fifty, might fall in love with some child who would lead me a merry chase, and take me to new lands again!

CLAUDINE. *We* have seen enough!

VÉTHEUIL. Yes, and when one has lived, and observed, one arrives at a true philosophy of life, and says that at the bottom of all this, happiness, or at least what most nearly approaches it, is always —

[*At this moment, interrupting VÉTHEUIL in the midst of his sentence, a Farandole, danced madly by a number of couples, rushes into the little salon, and in its whirlwind wake, sweeps out VÉTHEUIL and CLAUDINE.*]

This cold and summary account of *Amants* gives little enough of the spirit of the French, and the attempt but proves the extreme difficulty of conveying an adequate idea of its charm and grace. Its style and subject are so foreign to us that it is

doubtful whether a translation, however well done, could reproduce the essentially French flavor of the original.

Conjugal infidelity, however jestingly touched upon in this and other Donnay plays, is not of prime interest in itself; it is merely an excuse, an incident round which the poet weaves his delicate web of sentiment and subtle character analysis. In his Dedication to Molière (in *Le Ménage de Molière*) he says: "Reassure yourself, Monsieur, we of to-day are far from the old French *conteurs*, and their jokes on infidelity, which you yourself have often revived with so much *esprit*, or else complacently repeated. The conjugal accident no longer diverts us: it appears to us as a social necessity, yes, a shameful but logical consequence of marriage as it is most frequently practiced in the society of our day." This attitude toward adultery as a "social necessity" is most typical of Donnay; this statement throws a great deal of light on his work. Marriage, fidelity, love, are his subjects, and the greatest of these is love. That is why, among other things, *Amants* contains, as I have said, his philosophy par excellence.

Maurice Donnay was born in 1859 at Paris, of a well-to-do bourgeois family in the district of Montmartre, where the young Maurice was destined to make his first artistic *début* not many years later. His predilection for literature was noted in his early school days, for his instructors at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand and the Ecole Centrale made reference more than once in their reports to the "dreamy and contemplative" nature of the youth,

which had many times marked him out as a "poet" among his schoolfellows. In accordance with the wishes of his ambitious parents, he prepared himself for the profession of civil engineer, and in 1885 he entered, somewhat unwillingly, a contractor's office. He was evidently ill-suited for the work, and, six years later, as a direct result of his appearing in public and reciting his own verses in a cabaret on Montmartre, he was forced to resign his position. Between the years 1889 and 1891 he wrote and recited a number of graceful if occasionally vulgar and cynical "saynètes," which were keenly appreciated by the habitués of the *Chat Noir*. In 1892 his first play, *Lysistrata*, was produced at the Grand Théâtre; it was at once successful, and attracted some notice. The story and the wit of the Aristophanic comedy appealed to the somewhat kindred spirit of the Frenchman, who utilized, however, only the principal outlines of the Greek play, and rounded it out with a generous infusion of his own Gallic wit. The next important play was his most successful and is certainly his most brilliant, and will doubtless remain his finest achievement, *Lovers*. Jules Lemaitre, a great authority, a keen and conservative critic, pronounced this play "probably a masterpiece." He was speaking of the piece in its relation to French dramatic literature, not merely contemporaneous writing. The praise of critics and public soon lifted the young dramatist into the front rank, made way for further successes, and prepared a respectful hearing for everything he was destined to write.

*La Douleureuse* — an untranslatable expres-

sion of *argot* — again delves into the eternal question. This time it is a woman's play: she suffers. Again the dramatist tells us of the effect of passion on human character, and the treatment here, considered with that in *Amants*, should give us a clear idea of Donnay's mind. "The principal underlying idea in Donnay's plays," says Roger Le Brun, the author of a little monograph on the dramatist, "is, in its essence, this: that love, as a result of social conventions, for the most part hypocritically disguised by a puerile sentimentality, is forced to do service for the basest appetites as well as the most artificial emotions; it is debased by lies, by tricks, by the avarice of Man, side-tracked from its true and proper functions, going hand in hand with all our misdeeds like a monstrous and vile thing." This debasement "by lies" is the theme of *La Douleureuse*. Donnay harks back a moment to Ibsen, when he shows us the unhappy result of a lie in the past. The story of this play is in itself of little importance: it is not well constructed or highly interesting, though the theme is significant. But the dramatist has written one superb act, the second. The closing scene leaves one with much the same feeling as that of the fourth act of *Amants*; that same longing, somewhat sentimental, that regret for happiness lost, but happiness to be regained, hangs heavy over this pair of lovers who are parting. He says, "Don't you too feel a great weight lifted; aren't you even happy?" And she replies, "Oh, yes, but I'm going to cry, all the same." And the curtain drops.

*L'Affranchie* is another typical play. It is con-



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cerned with a weak and lying woman, but it is again the characterization and the poetic atmosphere which place this work among the best of its author.

*Georgette Lemeunier*, played by Réjane and Guitry, is the story of man and wife, the "victory of the wife over the caprices of the husband — a loyal victory, without the eternal ancient ruses common to womankind."

*Le Torrent* marks a radical departure in the "théâtre" of Donnay. This comes as near being a "thesis" play as any the author ever wrote: its theme is closely akin to that of several plays of Hervieu and Brieux. "The suicide of Valentine Lambert — an unfaithful husband — relieves him of the cowardly blame of his family for the crime of forcing motherhood on a woman, and constitutes a fearful condemnation of the terrible marriage law by which the male can take advantage of the most despotic means, and force his wife, by the exigencies of nature, to undergo the degrading lie of adultery."

The essential unity of Donnay's art cannot but suffer by combining with it the alloy of a collaborator, no matter how skillful or powerful that collaborator may be. Donnay twice collaborated with Lucien Descaves, and the resulting plays — *La Clairière* and *Oiseaux de passage* — we cannot but feel, fall into a class much below *Amants* and *L'Affranchie*. The first of these is another thesis play, the second a Feminist tract, one in which the thesis is of more importance than the play itself. If Donnay survives, he will be known as the author of two or three charming and clever

comedies of love, not as the champion of "self-realization" or woman's rights. The day of the thesis play seems to have passed, and the works of the present age must stand or fall according to art standards, not social or political. Donnay was evidently led to write these plays, together with *L'Autre Danger*, by the spirit which pervaded the air; but he must soon have learned that he might well have left the work of reform to those who were better fitted to polemics, and allowed Brieux to write *La Femme seule*, an infinitely finer social document than any Donnay attempted to produce. Yet *L'Autre Danger*, by reason of its manifestly interesting theme and masterly development of the serious side of human character, must ever remain one of the author's finest achievements. *L'Autre Danger* is clearly a thesis play, and the thesis constitutes anything but a "pleasant" subject. A woman who gives her daughter to her own lover for a husband — that is not a pretty situation; but handled by Donnay it becomes a terrible and a painful one, and the terror and pity are made the more poignant as the dramatist has hesitated so long to attack the subject. During more than two acts — up to the middle of the third — the theme, or at least its direct application, does not become evident. It seems that the author, realizing the odiousness of the situation, occupied as much time as possible in preparing for the disagreeable but highly dramatic climax — and this climax, when it comes, is the more effective as it is unexpected, or rather not lengthily and laboriously prepared for. But once he starts, the wheels of action move at lightning speed, and hardly are we aware of what

is happening, until it has become a thing of the past. One critic, Antoine Benoist, thinks that Donnay was afraid of his subject and wished to be rid of its unpleasant side as soon as he was able; but as Donnay is above all a dramatist, and not a prude or a moralist, and since he wishes to make a striking effect and pile up as quickly as he could all his accumulated action, the retardation of the story in the first half of the play is wholly justifiable on the grounds that he was seeking a greater tension and a more crushing climax. It was to such apparent neglect of form as this that Lemaître made reference when he said that Donnay "among our young dramatists is one of the few whose works are the closest to life because of this very negligence of composition."

The plays immediately following *Le Torrent* — the next work — are not of paramount importance. *La Bascule* and *Education de Prince* are, in the case of the first, a study of the relations between man and wife, and, in the second, a re-writing of a bright and satirical series of dialogues.

*Le Retour de Jérusalem* is the most ambitious and detailed of the modern plays of Donnay. In it he attempted a problem: Is real intimacy, intellectual and physical, possible between members of two races? But the universal application of that supposed problem is so difficult to determine, that the problem per se, is almost negligible. We must assume therefore that the author took a Jewess and a Gentile merely as types of radically different races, and studied them in and for themselves. In a long preface to the printed play,

called forth by many acrimonious articles and much discussion, Donnay says that he intended to place before the public, with all due fairness, the bred-in-the-bone difference between Jew and Gentile. However this may be, he has succeeded in writing a play which shows very clearly the essential difference between one human being and another. This is a love story, as well as a psychological study.

The production of *Le Retour de Jérusalem* in America not long ago with one of the cleverest living actresses, Madame Simone, in the leading rôle, showed clearly the great gulf between French and American theatrical methods. Through scene after scene the play proceeds slowly, developing character; long speech after long speech brings the action to its far-off climax. The American public was not willing to listen to conversation, no matter how brilliant or how interesting. It demanded action. Donnay is a dramatist, but he is likewise a poet and a thinker; the French audience, probably the best trained in the world, is willing to listen to good dialogue for half an hour, provided it is well spoken — the American "moving-picture" audience demands movement, not talk.

The next two plays, *L'Escalade* and *Paraître* do not merit special mention. The most interesting of the later plays is the only one in which the author went to the past for his subject-matter. For a number of years Donnay had been devoting a great deal of time to the study of Molière, upon whom he has contributed a large volume, and in 1912 the Comédie Française produced *Le Ménage de Molière*. In this five-act verse play

— Donnay has not forgotten his real gift for verse since the early Montmartre days! — he has rendered charming tribute to his compatriot, in the play itself as well as in the delicate and spiritual Dedication:

I am taking the liberty, Monsieur, of writing to you, as I have taken a greater already, that of writing a comedy on your household, and I believe that in putting a man such as you upon the stage, some explanation, if not excuse, is due you. . . . It is ever an extremely hazardous proceeding to put upon the stage a person who has once actually lived. So far as you yourself are concerned, Monsieur, if we know you thoroughly as an author, fairly well as actor and manager, we are very uncertain when we tread on the ground of your private life.— Why do so, then, you may well ask? . . . I understand, but it is the fault of your first biographer, J.-L. Gallois, sieur de Grimarest. Yes, he began it: he recounts anecdotes, and gives us to understand that you did not get along so very well with Armande; he says either too much or not enough, thereby arousing our curiosity, which has not yet died down. That simple admirer is therefore the first author of the *Ménage de Molière*, unless it be yourself, as I shall attempt to demonstrate before long. . . . Above all, Monsieur, do not try to scent out any excuse on my part, any answer to my critics. . . . I am speaking to you, and to you alone, as I owe an explanation only to the man who is the principal character in my play. . . . I dare to hope that you will discover in this comedy, Monsieur, the sincerest expression of tenderness for yourself and the profoundest admiration for your genius, just as, if the distance between us were not so great, I should allow myself to dedicate this play to you in person.

Donnay's latest play, *Les Eclaireuses*, marks no appreciable departure from his former work: it is

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a love story, touching upon the question of Feminism at moments, but it is primarily a *drame du cœur*. With the usual clever and delightful dialogue, the expected scenes of sentiment, the poet recounts the history of an ill-matched couple, ending with the ultimate "soul-mating" of the woman. Man's laws, his obstinate refusal to look facts in the face, woman's revolt and her final readjustment — there is nothing new in all this; but then Donnay believes that there is no new material, only love stories, differing one from the other in settings and characters. He at least lives up to his own preachments.



## EDMOND ROSTAND

ROSTAND is hardly a typical modern French dramatist: his is an exceptional case, and his inclusion in the present volume is intended rather to throw into contrast the other playwrights than a necessity to treat one who may be considered in any way a professional purveyor of amusement or ideas. He may stand for the poetic drama, which is, as I have already pointed out, not so popular in France to-day as the more or less realistic works of such dramatists as Brieux or Bataille.

The phenomenal success of *Cyrano de Bergerac* in 1897 did not, fortunately, turn its author into a professional playwright; Rostand has always remained a slow and painstaking artist. As opposed to even the careful custom of Hervieu, who produces on an average of one play every two years, he produces but three major works in a period of eighteen. Porto-Riche in this respect is the only dramatist who can compare with him. With scrupulous care and unerring judgment he has spent years polishing his verses and perfecting his style with an assiduity rivaling that of Flaubert. During the few years which preceded the production of *Chantecler*, paragraphs in the newspapers often appeared relating how the piece was held back until four lines in the third act assumed the precise shape which suited the poet. The ten

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years between the production of *L'Aiglon* and *Chantecler* were many of them spent on the latter play, and the result, both as to general conception and to the literary style, fully justified the long years of labor.

Edmond Rostand was born at Marseilles in 1868. After spending the first years of his youth in his native Midi he came to Paris and studied for the law. But the poet was stronger in him than the lawyer, and soon the dramatist was to assert himself above the lyric poet. Two trifles in dramatic form — *Le Gant rouge* and *Les Deux Pierrots* — neither of which has been performed in public, were written before the publication of the poet's first volume. *Les Deux Pierrots* had been accepted at the Comédie Française, but owing to the death of Théodore de Banville, whose plays this one resembled, it was thought wise to withdraw it.

*Les Musardises*, published in 1890, is a slight volume of charming lyrical verses. While it was well received by a small public and favorably reviewed by the critics, its success was in no way phenomenal; it gave little or no promise of the brilliant flashes which were later to illuminate *Cyrano* and *L'Aiglon* and *Chantecler*. The following *Vieux Conte*, with its soft cadences and circumspect use of words, will afford some idea of this first attempt:

Dans l'éparpillement soyeux des cheveux d'or,  
Et parmi les blancheurs des coussins toute blanche,  
Ayant clos pour cent ans ses grands yeux de pervenche,  
Souriant vaguement à son reve, elle dort.

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Sa tête de côté légèrement se penche.  
Un vitrail entr'ouvert laisse voir le décor  
Du parc, où les oiseaux ne chantent pas encor,  
Car la Fée endormit chacun d'eux sur sa branche.

Au pied du lit sommeille un beau page blondin.  
Elle dort, immobile en son vertugadin,  
La jupe laissant voir un bout de sa babouche. . . .

Toute rose, elle dort son sommeil ingénu,  
Car le Prince Charmant n'est pas encor venu  
Qui doit la réveiller d'un baiser sur la bouche.

Then came *Les Romanesques*. Adolphe Brisson, in his *le Théâtre et les mœurs*, quotes Jules Claretie on the débuts of the young dramatist. Just after the first little play was withdrawn, Claretie said to Rostand:

“Bring me another act.” [Act in French may also mean one-act play.]

“I shall bring you two,” answered the poet. In a few weeks' time *Les Romanesques* was written and two years later — after the usual wait — it was performed. I shall never forget it.

“Who is this Rostand?” people inquired.

And those who knew said: “He is an influential business man, well spoken of, one of the big-wigs of the *Comptoir d'escompte*. He has made use of his influence to succeed as a writer.”

“Then he's an amateur?”

“Undoubtedly —”

After the first act the audience was amazed — A delicious trifle!

And those who knew again busied themselves —

“We are not at all surprised. That book of his was full of promise.”

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“Has he published a book?”

“Yes: *Les Musardises*. . . . Very remarkable.”

*Les Romanesques* — known in English as *The Romancers* or *The Fantasticks* — is an ingenious and altogether charming bit of high comedy. It smacks of Italy, and Banville, and Musset, yet there is that distinctive touch which makes of it an original creation.

Percinet and Sylvette, two romantic youngsters, enamored of each other and of *Romeo and Juliet*, which they read together sitting on the top of an old wall, are so filled with romantic notions that they are convinced of the fact that they are separated through the hatred of their respective fathers. Meeting secretly in a corner of the old park, they plan to elope. But the fathers, who are as a matter of fact the best of friends, realize that the only way of uniting their wayward children is by pretending to be mortal enemies. They employ therefore the braggadocio Straforel, who will on the evening of the elopement attempt a “first-class abduction” of the little heroine. This villain, then, together with his mock-desperadoes, appears upon the scene at the appointed hour when Percinet is about to meet his sweetheart. descend upon her, and attempt to carry her off. Percinet, who lies in wait, springs to her rescue and, sword in hand, dispels the ravishers, and turns to Straforel. Straforel, knowing well the part he has to play, allows the young man to disarm him, and falls a moment later, apparently dead. The lovers are united, the fathers pretend to be reconciled and agree to the match. The “tag”

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to the act, is a touch of the true Rostandesque :

BERGAMIN. [*In an undertone, to STRAFOREL, who rises.*] What? What's this? This paper — and your signature? What is it, if you please?

STRAFOREL. [*Saluting BERGAMIN.*] Monsieur, it is my bill! [*He falls to the ground again.*]

So far, so good, but in the second act the lovers learn the truth of the matter. Their disillusionment is complete, and Percinet resolves to go away in search of adventure and romance. In the last act he returns, only to find that Sylvette herself has been seeking her own romance, for Straforel, under a noble pseudonym, has been writing ardent love-letters to her. Both are weary of searching for something which seems to vanish when they seek it, and both have learned at last that true romance cannot be sought. Percinet has wandered only to find his happiness at home.

PERCINET. . . . I adore you!

SYLVETTE. After all our disappointments?

PERCINET. That makes no difference.

SYLVETTE. But our fathers deceived us most outrageously!

PERCINET. What of it? Now — in my heart — it is day —

SYLVETTE. But they only pretended to be mortal enemies?

PERCINET. Did *we* pretend that we loved each other?

And a little farther on :

SYLVETTE. . . . We did love, and we thought ourselves wicked.

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PERCINET. We were, and let us feel pleasantly remorseful about it! As it is only the intention that counts, we were really wicked, because we thought we were.

SYLVETTE. . . . True, but I am sorry . . . that our danger was only imaginary.

PERCINET. It was real, because we thought it so.

The moral is pleasantly told, if moral the play can be admitted to have: happiness lies within one's self, and true romance is in the heart. The next play, *La Princesse lointaine*, more serious in intent, more recondite and involved in style, has certain analogies with the earlier comedy; here the poet tells us that the pursuit of an ideal — in this case, physical and by inference spiritual beauty — is in itself worth as much as its attainment.

Prince Joffroy Rudel, troubador of Blaye, has heard from pilgrims returning from the East, of a marvelously beautiful princess: Mélissinde of Orient, Countess of Tripoli. In spite of grave illness he sets out on the perilous journey from Provence to see the lady of his dreams. The play opens on the galley, "which appears to have come a long way through very tempestuous weather: sails ripped, yards broken, ropes in a tangle, mast started. There are evidences of fighting having taken place on board: spots of blood, weapons strewn here and there. Just before dawn. Gray and transparent sky growing pale. Stars vanishing. Sea of a violet hue, with foggy streaks. Indistinct horizon. By degrees, as the act progresses, the light increases."<sup>1</sup> There

<sup>1</sup> This and the following quotations are from the translation of Charles Renauld.



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is discontent among the crew: they begin to doubt of their quest, and are hungry and worn out. "What," asks the scholar Erasmus of Father Trophime, "does he gain, for instance —?"

FATHER TROPHIME. All!

ERASMUS. Oh!

FATHER TROPHIME. Yes, he gains, at least my thought is such,

Through every great disinterested act;  
As much as on Crusaders' deeds, I feel  
That he must smile on love that's true and pure.

ERASMUS. He cannot set this love adventure here  
Beside the rescue of the Holy Tomb!

FATHER TROPHIME. His object's not this one deliverance.

For think you not that, if he wished to chase  
A horde of infidels from off the Tomb,  
One sweep of angel wings would be enough?  
Far greater his design. Be sure it is to call  
All those who live in dullness, pride and sloth  
Away from selfish, dark indifference,  
To throw them, strong and singing, in the fray,  
Devotion-daft to seeking death afar,  
Inspired by forgetfulness of self.

A page later Father Trophime says: "All noble aims bring forth a nobler aim."

This striving for an ideal and its treatment in *La Princess lointaine* is a curious foreshadowing of the principal theme of *Chantecler*. Rostand has never lost his early healthy optimism.

The second act takes place in Mélissinde's palace. The Emperor Manuel is about to marry her and, being of a jealous disposition, has placed

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guards about her. Meanwhile, Rudel and his crew have landed, and the Prince intends to proceed at once to the palace. Mélissinde has heard of Rudel; she reads his poems, and nurses her ideal from afar. She "thirsts for love's sublimity." Having learned of the arrival of the foreign galley, the guards redouble their vigilance over the princess. But a rich Jew gains admittance to her presence, on the pretext of selling her goods from the Orient; he tells her that a poet from Provence has landed and wishes to see her at once. Not long after, Rudel's friend Bertrand, after fighting his way to her, tells Mélissinde of his mission, and informs her that Rudel lies dying on his galley and should like to see his loved one before it is too late.

BERTRAND. Make haste! I promised!

MÉLISSINDE.

But — but

you, Sir Knight,

Who are you then?

BERTRAND.

Bertrand d'Allamanon,

His brother, friend — Come on then, quickly!

MÉLISSINDE.

No!

The next act is the same scene as the preceding. Mélissinde's reason for refusing to see Rudel is not at once made clear, but we are not left long in doubt, for she begins to make love to Bertrand; entranced by her beauty, and rapidly succumbing to her advances, he betrays his friend, deciding to remain with the Princess. For a moment both are stricken with remorse as a voice from the outside shouts that a galley in the harbor has hoisted the black flag, but the galley proves to be that of

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the chief guard, whom Bertrand had slain. They now resolve to see Rudel.

The last act takes us back to the deck of the galley, where Rudel lies on his death-bed. The Jew, stung by an insult cast in his teeth by Bertrand, has been telling the tale of Rudel's betrayal, and is flung into the sea by the incredulous crew. Rudel too has believed nothing of the story. Then in the distance Mélissinde's magnificent galley is descried. The Princess boards the stranger ship, and the very sailors weep for joy: *their* ideal, the end which they strove, is at last realized! Then she is brought into Rudel's presence. "His eyes open as he sees her, then grow larger and full of light, and a smile comes to his lips." He forgets his troubles and sufferings, and she is glorified and lifted above mortal things; both are happy, and not even death can destroy their happiness. The ideal of each has been the quest and that is over. He dies, amid the splendor of the sunset.

MÉLISSINDE.                   The sky's aglow!  
Behold! A prince's and a poet's death  
Is yours, with head at rest as dream foretold,  
In love, in grace and majesty supreme!  
You die with heaven's blessing, undistressed  
By trappings and by sights funereal;  
In flowers' fragrance and in harmony,  
A death that's spared all pain and bitterness. . . .  
Close not his eyes; he's gazing at me still!

SORIMONDE. [*Terrified.*] His hands are locked  
around your hair!

MÉLISSINDE.                   It's his!  
[*With a dagger, which she takes from JOFFROY'S  
belt, she cuts her hair, that remains in the hands of*

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RUDEL. *The hair falls across his body.*]

BERTRAND. Not that! It is too much!

MÉLISSINDE. [*Without turning toward BERTRAND.*]  
Who spoke?

BERTRAND. Too much!

MÉLISSINDE. 'Twas you, Bertrand? We must for-  
swear ourselves. . . .

My soul at last was sister to a soul,  
And I am different.

[BERTRAND *then decides to continue his way to  
the Holy Land.*]

MÉLISSINDE. Farewell! No tears—I go to holy  
peace.

I've learnt at last the greatest thing of all—

FATHER TROPHIME. [*Kneeling by JOFFROY'S body.*]  
Undying love is work for Heaven done!

And the curtain falls.

Something of the doctrine of love set forth in *La Princesse lointaine* is to be found in the next play, *La Samaritaine*, which was first performed in 1897, two years after the *Princesse*. Compared with the later works it is slight. It is a poetic setting of the story of the Woman of Samaria. There is a certain human element in this play; that is to say, the poet applied himself to the task of conceiving Photine as a very passionate and loving woman, not merely a wicked Magdalen who repents. In an interview he once said: "Is it not a most extraordinary drama of conscience? Imagine Liane de Pougy going to the Bois, meeting Christ there, and suddenly returning to Paris, bearing only one desire in her breast, one mad wish: to convert her compatriots?" The simple

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Bible story is amplified and turned into an elaborate picture, a lovely "Evangile."

Still, there was little indication of what was to come in the brilliant and astonishing *Cyrano*. *Les Romanesques* was slight, *La Princesse lointaine* hesitating, *La Samaritaine* quiet. Rostand was as yet appreciated by a few, who esteemed him merely as a charming poet, possessing some ingenuity and skill in writing poetic plays. Paris, and soon after the whole of the civilized world, were to be astounded by the famous *Cyrano*, at the Porte Sainte-Martin Theater during the same year, 1897, in which *La Samaritaine* first saw the light.

It may arouse no small amount of curiosity in some future historian of the theater to account for the unprecedented enthusiasm provoked by *Cyrano de Bergerac*; he may trace its form to Victor Hugo, he may justly conclude that it contains nothing new or original, or he may finally decide that it came at the psychological moment, when the Théâtre Libre was in its decline, and the public was tired of Realism. But he will be wide of the mark. Madame Rostand's statement, recounted by M. Brisson in the work above quoted, comes as near the truth as any single sentence well can: "Certain people exist who always inspire sympathy simply because they possess charm. Isn't it the same way with the mind and what it creates?" Charm, if it may be taken to include joy in life, optimism, ideals, beauty in and for itself, is what makes of *Cyrano* one of the finest dramatic

and literary works of the generation. The hypothetical critic of the future may be right in attributing to Rostand the desire to revolt against the sordidness of Naturalism, and certain it is that this play came at a time when the ideas set forth by Antoine were either so universally accepted as to provoke little opposition, or that they were being gradually absorbed and modified by writers with a more genial outlook on life. Rostand was, of course, too far aloof from the controversies of the day deliberately to write a propaganda piece, but he must have felt the irksome yoke imposed by the more ardent followers of Antoine.

Together with the charm of the character of that true Gascon, poet and swordsman, faithful friend and poseur, is the charm of the style, that inimitable mixture of Victor Hugo, Musset, and — Rostand. But beyond these, we are called upon to admire the extreme dexterity with which the plot is handled, and the truly amazing brilliancy of the speeches and the lines. If nothing else, *Cyrano* is a tour de force of unequalled cleverness. Take for instance the famous speech addressed, in the First Act, to Valvert, on the subject of his (Cyrano's) nose:

CYRANO. . . . You might say — oh, Dieu! any number of things — as you vary the tone of voice — for instance: Aggressively: “Ah, Monsieur, had I such a nose, I should have it amputated at once!” Amicably: “It must surely be in the way when you drink! Have a bowl made for yourself!” Descriptively: “It's a rock, a peak, a cape! What, a cape? Indeed, it's a peninsula!”



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Curiously: "What do you use that oblong capsule for? An *écritoire* or a scissors' box?" Graciously: "Are you so enamored of birds that you afford them the hospitality of that perch for their little feet?" Truculently: "And, Monsieur, when you smoke, do not people cry out that the chimney is afire, seeing the smoke come forth from your nose?" Considerately: "Take care or your head, overweighted by that huge mass, will fall to the ground!" Tenderly: "Have a little parasol made for it for fear the sun should fade its color!" Pedantically: "That animal which Aristophanes calls Hippocamelephantelos must surely have had a similar lump of flesh and blood beneath his forehead!" Cavalierly: "Is that hook in the height of fashion? It's really most useful to hang your hat on!" Emphatically: "Surely, oh majestic nose, no wind can give it a cold over its entire extent — unless it be the mistral!" Dramatically: "It's the Red Sea when it bleeds!" Admiringly: "What a sign-board for a perfumer!" Lyrically: "Is it a conch, and are you a Triton?" Simply: "When does one visit this monument?" . . . Like a peasant: "Hi there, is that a nose? Oh my! It's a little pumpkin or a big turnip!" In a military manner: "Advance against the cavalry!" From a practical point of view: "Why don't you put it in a lottery? It will surely win first prize!" Or, if you wish to parody Pyramus as he sighs: "Here is the nose which spoils its master's harmony! It blushes for its treachery!" Something like that, my dear friend, is what you might have said, if you had a spark of wit or learning in you. . . .

There are many such speeches in *Cyrano* and *L'Aiglon*; it may be that they were written with a particular actor or actress in view — Coquelin in one case, Sarah Bernhardt in the other — but the fact remains that they are in keeping with the rest of the play and with the character in whose mouth

they are put. They are the old-fashioned tirades brought up-to-date and thoroughly humanized; vivid, joyful, brilliant. This same spirit of bravura which incites Cyrano to perform exploits of almost superhuman endeavor, animates the poet. He enjoys Cyrano's throwing his purseful of gold onto the stage and crying "Mais quel geste!"; he is with the gentle prompter under the balcony, at the ramparts of Arras, and in the convent garden; he stands close by the Duc de Reichstadt as he delivers his "pas-prisonnier mais" speech to Metternich; he watches at the bedside of Napoleon's unfortunate son. This identification of the poet with his characters and their actions is undoubtedly what makes of his plays living works; their verve is his verve, their *esprit*, his own.

*L'Aiglon*, performed for the first time in 1900, with Bernhardt in the rôle of the Duke, came as something of a disappointment after *Cyrano*; indeed, it is hard to conceive of anything but an anticlimax after that play. The subject is rather epic than dramatic, and its inordinate length, the weak character of the protagonist, the somewhat disunified plot, militate against the piece. Yet it contains many admirable scenes and speeches, that scene for instance where the Duke is playing with his toy soldiers. Here the whole pathos of the tragedy of Napoleon is brought to us in a simple bit of stage business. The weakly youth is arranging his soldiers in order of battle, and is surprised by Metternich. "And where are the Austrians?" inquires Metternich. "They have all fled!" answers the enthusiastic youth. Turn

to the mirror episode, and the many scenes in which the old soldier Flambeau appears, and the Field of Wagram — effective as stage pictures, impressive as literature!

Yet in spite of its manifold charms and its particular scenes it fails as an artistic unit. The poet's tendency, too, to juggle with words, becomes more sharply accentuated. His preciousity in *Chantecler* becomes in places a fault. Chantecler's well-known speech in the third act, is a point in question:

Oui, Coquards cocardes de coquilles,  
 Coquardeaux Coquebins, Coquelets, Cocodrilles,  
 Au lieu d'être coquets de vos cocoricos,  
 Vous rêviez d'être, ô Coqs! de drôles de cocos!  
 Oui, Mode! pour que d'eux tu t'emberlucoquasses,  
 Coquine! ils n'ont voulu, ces Coqs, qu'être cocasses!  
 Mais, Coquins! le cocasse exige un Nicolet!  
 On n'est jamais assez cocasse quand on l'est!  
 Mais qu'un Coq, au coccyx, aît plus que vous de  
 ruches,  
 Vous passez, Cocodès, comme des coqueluches!  
 Mais songez que demain, Coquefredouilles! mais  
 Songez qu'après-demain, malgré, Coqueplumets!  
 Tous ces coqueluchons dont on s'emberlucoque,  
 Un plus cocasse Coq peut sortir d'une coque,  
 — Puisque le Cocassier, pour varier ses stocks,  
 Peut plus cocassement cocufier des Coqs! —  
 Et vous ne serez plus, vieux Cocâtres qu'on casse,  
 Que des Coqs rococos pour ce Coq plus cocasse!

UN COQ. Et le moyen de ne pas être rococo?

CHANTECLER. C'est de ne penser qu'au —

UN COQ.

Qu'au —?

TOUS LES COQS.

Qu'au —?

CHANTECLER.

Cocorico!

This is diabolically clever, and the play is full of such speeches.

And as the poet's skill increased his knowledge of life deepened. In the first of the plays which may be taken as a serious comment on life, *La Princesse lointaine*, Rostand wrote of the ideal pursued for its own sake, in *La Samaritaine* he told of a woman's love and her redemption, in *Cyrano* he painted a splendid character upon a gorgeous and joyous background, in *L'Aiglon*, a pathetic figure with a tragic end; in *Chantecler*, the child of his early maturity, he preaches the gospel of work. Not that he wrote a thesis play — he would smile at the notion — but out of the depths of his being he created a work of living art which embodied, as all great work must, his inmost beliefs. Chantecler is Rostand's ideal of manhood; he is not a hero, but he believes himself to be such, and, just as Percinet said to Sylvette, they thought themselves wicked, and they were! Chantecler thinks himself the master, and he is; he believes that it is his Corcorico which makes the sun rise, and when at last he finds that it rises without his aid, he is momentarily disillusioned; but through the love of the Pheasant-Hen and through renewed faith in the nobility of his work, such as it is, he resolves to do his own small part, and *help* the sun to rise.

Rostand has explained in many interviews his own intentions; I shall therefore repeat his own comments on the various characters, as retold in Marco F. Liberma's *The Story of Chantecler*:

“*Chantecler* was to be the drama of human endeavor grappling with life. The Cock represents man loving passionately his chosen vocation, man who has faith in his work, and who will allow nothing to sway him in its accomplishment. He meets the Pheasant, representing woman, the modern woman: emancipated, independent, domineering; jealous of the male’s high task; who means to enslave him to her sole affection; and who yields only after she has been overcome, brought to submission, with, perhaps, the secret hope that she may still some day hold sway over him and thus be avenged. We have here the eternal struggle that opens with the Book of Genesis, the struggle to reach some compromise by which man and woman are to be made cognizant of their respective places, accept the station in life imposed upon them by virtue of some yet unrecognized, but none the less stringent, restrictions in their natures. On the one hand we have the will to do, untrammelled by physical and social limitations on which nevertheless hangs the very existence of the race; on the other hand, the will to be, for the purpose that transcends man’s very dream. And it is because this passiveness demanded of woman, and through which her power for good over man seems doubled a hundredfold, arouses in this day opposition so fierce as to endanger the very life of the family, the poet thought it well to sound a note of warning. *Chantecler* and the Pheasant are the will and the feelings at war with each other. The will and the affections are at war in the breast of each one of us.”

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With this basis the poet went to work to write a modern play, which was poetic at the same time. He has shown that it is possible to be poetic about the things of the age: a reception, a telephone, a fad. "Characters garbed in animal dress," he once exclaimed, "expressing themselves like human beings,—like Parisians of the day. What a find! And furthermore, what an opportunity to speak of things in nature, to be deeply moved by flowers, birds, the bits of grass, or the insect . . . and what a setting! No, really, a poet could not wish for a more beautiful theme!"

The method of presenting his story was well-chosen, although it was so original that the good theater-goers of Paris were puzzled. The play was not a success, and enjoyed a comparatively short run. Too clever, too obscure, too long, were the common verdicts. It was again an instance of the insularity of the French public, which was the last, by the way, to see Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird*: St. Petersburg, London, New York, and Chicago had been flocking to see the *féerie* before the Théâtre Réjane opened its doors to the most famous play of the time.

In 1910 a pantomime, accompanied by a poem, was produced at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt: it was Rostand's *Le Bois sacré*, written some years previously. This trifle is a parody on the gods of ancient Greece, more in the style of *Les Romanesques* than the later plays; graceful, witty, slight. It deserves no special mention.



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Rostand achieved fame at an early age: appointed Officer of the Legion of Honor in 1900, elected to the Academy in 1903, he is undoubtedly the best-known dramatist in France. Yet he lives in modest retirement, assiduously working at his *Faust*, which was announced some years ago. He has passed the critical period of his artistic career, and there is little fear that he will accede to popular demand, and hasten new works to the stage, or in any way cheapen an art which his country justly holds in honor. Together with Porto-Riche, he lives for his art alone, and deigns to allow his plays to become public property only after they have undergone the most minute and painstaking revision.

Rostand is happy in the pursuit of his ideal, and with his love for it he may justly say with his own Father Trophime :

Oui, les grandes amours travaillent pour le ciel.

## JULES LEMAITRE

“CRITICISM,” says Jules Lemaître, “is the art of enjoying books.” M. Lemaître has practiced what he preached, and in some thirty thick volumes he has amassed his enjoyment of books and plays. *Les Impressions de théâtre* and *Les Contemporains* have already assumed a place which they will long occupy in the front rank of original thought during the last part of the Nineteenth Century.

When Lemaître speaks of Shakespeare and Molière, it is as if he had never heard of either before; he records his first impressions of *Hamlet* and *Le Misanthrope* as if these plays had just come fresh from the press. Unhampered by the accumulated prejudices of former generations, he analyzes in a leisurely and orthodox manner each work, recording with absolute sincerity his opinions on Georges Ohnet and Racine, Paul Bourget and Rousseau. When he tells us that Racine is worth reading, that the author of the *Ironmaster* is vastly overrated, that his novels have no literary merit, we feel readily inclined to believe him. His independence of thought is naïvely manifested in his essay on Maupassant, in which he says that he was at first prone to underrate the genius of the young writer simply because the great Flaubert spoke of him in such glowing terms. Here is the opening paragraph of that essay:

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I used to go from time to time to see Gustave Flaubert at Croisset (that was in 1880). It appears that I met Maupassant there one day, just as he was leaving for Paris. At least, that is what Maupassant says. I really don't remember: I have the most capricious memory in the world. But I recall clearly that Flaubert spoke enthusiastically of his young friend, and that he read to me, with that sonorous voice of his, a story which appeared some months later in the volume entitled *Des Vers*. It had to do with the separation of two lovers, after a last walk in the country: *he* was brutal, *she* quietly desperate. I thought it not at all bad, but I was somewhat on my guard because of the aged Flaubert's extravagant admiration, so that I did not at that time realize that it was really very good. Maupassant was at that time, etc. . . .

This informal, easy, conversational way of writing criticism makes Lemaître delightful reading, so that we too are likely perhaps to behave as the critic did in the presence of the "aged Flaubert," and be on our guard, and fail to see the extraordinary merit of the criticism. Profundity of thought and heaviness of style do not of necessity go hand in hand. Lemaître is as profound as Brunetière, the only difference between the two being that Lemaître amuses us with unexpected quips and turns, amusing anecdotes, and helps us to retain important points which might otherwise escape us, while Brunetière, saying perhaps as much, risks tiring us, because his method of presentation lacks lightness, variety, *esprit*. Sarcey, that benevolent despot of the French stage for nearly half a century, is more nearly akin to Lemaître than Brunetière, by reason of his simplicity and occasionally brutal sincerity; but Sarcey is a literary bourgeois, Lemaître an aristocrat.

A critic, and above all a dramatic critic, who ventures into the field of drama, runs grave risks. Do not his brother critics hold him up to the standards for which he himself has stood — and many others for which he has not — and condemn him for falling short of those principles the shattering of which he has so often censured in others? Lemaître's first play, *Révoltée*, was produced in 1889. It was not a success, and was received with a good deal of adverse comment.

By the year 1889 Lemaître was fairly well known in the literary world. Born in a little town in Touraine in 1853, he received his early education in his native province, pursued his studies later in Paris, taught school in Le Havre and two other French cities, and, for a short time, in Algiers. At the age of thirty-one he permanently established himself in Paris, where he had been summoned to fill the position of dramatic critic on the *Journal des Débats*. At that time he was known to a few readers as the author of a slight volume of youthful verses, some of them crude and some delicate, called *Les Médaillons* (1880), and some of those essays which were later collected in *Les Contemporains*. The poems were followed seven years later by a collection of short stories, *Sérénus*, which gave evidence of real creative power, and proved the writer well capable of telling a story in direct and convincing terms. The versatile young man was spreading his wings, then, in the late 'eighties; but as he manifested a desire to fly in the direction of the stage, he a dramatic critic, his confrères berated him severely, and declared — with more or less truth — that

he had not proved himself a dramatist by writing *Révoltée*. For the next few years he continued writing plays, finding time however to write one of his finest works, the novel *Les Rois* (1893). As we are primarily concerned with Lemaître the dramatist, we must content ourselves by accepting the verdict of critics and the public, and recording the fact that Lemaître's only novel remains one of the most popular and highly-thought-of novels of the generation. *Contes blancs* (1900) and *En marge des vieux livres* (1905-1907) are likewise among the most charming works of the author.

*Révoltée* is decidedly a first attempt, crude and full of "influences." It seems as if the first-nighter had relied a little too much on scattered tag-ends of Ibsen and some of the young innovators of the Théâtre Libre. The play might well be called *Impressions de théâtre*. A reading of the piece leaves one with the feeling that he has seen it all before: the stupid and uninteresting Georg Tesman — husband; the misunderstood wife, her struggle for freedom, self-expression. There is some hesitancy in the story, the plot moves on the wheels of time-worn conventions, there is a duel and a final reconciliation in which it is hard to believe. But the play is noteworthy, however, by reason of some good bits of characterization; Hélène and her professor husband Rousseau, are what render *Révoltée* worth reading. Lemaître was the first to realize the weakness of his work: in his own criticism of it he says: "You see, the last act is very mediocre — now I have thought of a much better one, but it is too

late." Instead of rewriting the play, he proceeded to write another.

An incident serves to reveal Lemaître's ideas on playwriting, ideas which were soon to develop and form the basis of many of his later plays. Sarcey said of the next attempt, *Le Député Leveau*, "This is no play." To which Lemaître replied, "Je m'en moque, si c'est de la vie." (Literally, "I don't care a hang, so long as it is life.") It was hardly that, but the answer was worthy of its author.

*Le Député Leveau* is well written, well constructed, and much nearer "life" than *Révoltée*, but it is still far from *Le Pardon* and *La Massière*. It is a satire on the parvenu politician, and is concerned with his love-affair and subsequent divorce. Leveau, after falling in love with the Marquise de Grèges, seeks to divorce his wife, but is at first met with considerable opposition; this is later broken down in a rather unconvincing manner. The Marquise's husband has made friends with Leveau for political reasons, but Leveau is not long in learning that he has served merely as an instrument in the Marquis' hands, and is the victim of an intrigue. The *dénouement* is feeble: Leveau sends the Marquis an anonymous letter, arranges that the Marquise and himself shall be found together, irreparably compromised, and that he (the Marquis) will be forced to divorce his wife. The plot works, the divorce is obtained, and we are led to suppose that Leveau ultimately becomes the husband of the Marquise. The story is "theatrical," but there are numerous bits of characterization which partly redeem the play.



*Mariage blanc* is one of the most charming and interesting comedies of its day. Jacques de Tièvre, a *blasé* man of the world, a relic of twenty years' dissipation, comes to Mentone on the Riviera, to rest. There he meets a Mme. Aubert and her two daughters: Marthe, and her half-sister, Simone, a young girl in the last stages of consumption. His assiduous visits are interpreted by the mother and Marthe as a desire on his part to marry Marthe, but it is really the invalid who has attracted him. The idea of making love to a young woman who has but a few months to live appeals to his abnormal imagination. He tells Mme. Aubert of his strange passion; she is naturally astonished, but, noticing that Simone reciprocates his love, and not wishing to risk the shock which a refusal of Jacques as a suitor would cause to the girl, she gives her consent to the marriage. At first the disappointed and wounded Marthe opposes the match, but as Simone is suddenly taken ill, she "forgives" Jacques. But she cannot forgive the sister, who, she believes, robbed her of a husband, and, partly out of spite, partly by inclination, she gives Jacques a rendezvous. Simone surprises the two, and falls dead.<sup>1</sup>

The interest of the play lies in its strange plot, and in the characters of Marthe and Jacques. Lemaître tells us, in answer to one of the numerous attacks made on the play: "My mistake was in believing that Jacques de Tièvre's idea was in

<sup>1</sup> The original ending, according to Lemaître, was this: Marthe, knowing that any sort of exposure would be certain death to her sister, opens a window in the room where Simone is lying, which results in the consumptive's death.

nowise out of the ordinary, that his behavior and sentiments were easy to understand, quite acceptable as a matter of course. And why should I not have thought so? Jacques' dream is one which I myself once had, some twelve or fifteen years ago, spontaneously, in regard to a young girl I met in a family 'pension' where I took my meals. Doubtless, it was only a dream . . . but in reality that dream did not seem so absurd or impossible. Above all, there appeared to be nothing immoral in it." But Jacques' attitude may be condemned on the grounds of morality; for, in spite of the fact that perhaps he loved Simone after his marriage, he married her out of pity and, to a certain extent, because the whole adventure was romantic and piquant. Marthe as a character is scarcely more than a sketch; but how deft are the touches which make her live, how deeply we feel her sense of injury and loss! Will Lemaître ever write a play about Marthe, expanding her field of action, entering with greater detail into her inmost thoughts?

Two years after *Mariage blanc* came *Flipote*, a rather rigid, "well-made" piece. The characterization is good, but the story is decidedly banal. Two lovers "separate the day they find themselves rivals in public favor." Between *Mariage blanc* and *Les Rois*, a comparatively weak piece of work can easily be forgiven.

It will be remembered that the title of Lemaître's only novel was *Les Rois*. That novel he dramatized in 1893. The play was a great success at the Théâtre de la Renaissance. Like many of the plays of François de Curel, the austere

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writer of *Les Fossiles*, this was based upon a newspaper clipping relating the disappearance of a prince of the House of Austria. Like Curel, Lemâtre used the incident merely as an excuse for a psychological work of deep import. The aged King of Alfania has abdicated in favor of his son Hermann, a young man whose principles of democracy and progress are in direct opposition to his father's. As he ascends the throne, he is confronted with the grave problem of a popular uprising, the object of which is the increase of the rights and power of the people. Once crowned, Hermann, acting contrary to the advice of his wife Wilhelmina and his ministers, decides in favor of the people. Hermann's revolutionary doctrines are not all his own, for a woman, Frida de Thalberg, his former mistress, had imbued him with the spirit of freedom which caused so great a disturbance in the kingdom. Awdotia Latanief, a "revolutionary mystic," a friend of Frida, has likewise had much to do in the shaping of the mind of the young King. Meanwhile the people, having tasted of freedom, invade the palace, demanding further rights and more power. Giving way to the entreaties of his wife, Hermann orders the General to "do his duty"; the crowd is dispersed, some revolutionaries are killed, and for the moment the revolt is put down. False to his own principles, Hermann decides to go to Frida for consolation; she is stationed not far away, at Loewenberg. He leaves, followed by Wilhelmina. At the Pavilion of Orsova are Frida, the King, and Awdotia. The two women, at first alone, discuss the political situation and Awdotia

proposes that Hermann be assassinated in order that the revolution may take its course unhindered; but Frida, fearing for the life of the man she loves, promises that if she be left alone with him, she will induce him to abdicate. Hermann and Frida are then left together; Frida's passion for the liberty of Alfania has now given way to her particular passion for its king. "I don't want to be the shameful rival of the Queen of Alfania; but if you are truly unhappy and tired of your rôle of king and will abdicate, then I will be yours!" Hermann is willing to give up all for Frida; but just at this moment the figure of Wilhelmina is seen in the background. Ignorant of the danger, Hermann takes Frida in his arms, Wilhelmina enters, takes the revolver Awdotia has left on the table, and aims at Frida; but Hermann, stepping between them, receives the shot and dies a moment later. Wilhelmina tells the aged King what she has done, and he replies, making her the Regent: "You have done so much to defend the crown, that I know of no one in whose hands it could safer be!" This drama of "passion and ideas" is thoroughly effective, with the exception of the final act; the psychological insight of the author is deeper than in any other of his plays, with the exception of *Le Pardon*. But the interest is so often shifted that we are left a little bewildered. If Lemaître had concentrated more on the characters of Hermann, Frida, and Wilhelmina, we should doubtless have had a finer work. That finer work was to come two years later.

With *L'Age difficile* Lemaître gave proof of his command over the dramatic medium. With per-

fect ease he conducts his hero, a man of middle age, through dangerous love affairs, and entertains us with a series of delightful genre scenes. Those parts of the play dealing with the "Indian Summer" of Chambray, his meeting an old sweetheart after many years of separation from her, are handled with great dexterity and gentle tenderness.

Up to the year 1895 Lemaître had made various attempts with a good measure of success in the delineation of character; in *Les Rois* and *Mariage blanc* he had gone far into the analysis of human motives; but not until *Le Pardon* did all his power of presenting human beings and dealing with real problems come to its fullest fruition. *Les Rois*, as we have seen, was ragged in places, *Mariage blanc* somewhat abnormal and inclined to be over-sentimental; *Le Pardon* comes as near being a Slice of Life as Porto-Riche's *Amoureuse*, or any of its numerous progeny.

For commercial, and occasionally for artistic reasons, several modern plays of full length contain but five, four, or three characters. The charming comedy, *The Mollusc*, by Hubert Henry Davies, and François de Curel's *La Danse devant le miroir* contain but four characters each. *Le Pardon* has only three. A dramatist who is able to write a play with so few characters and make that play interesting and effective must be acknowledged by reason of that *tour de force* an accomplished man of the theater. In the second act of *The Thief*, Henry Bernstein has written a duologue, which for dramatic tension could hardly be improved upon; but the intrinsic interest of the

situation itself, which had been prepared for in the foregoing act through the agency of a number of people, helped sustain the act. Lemaître's story is simple and commonplace: Suzanne has been unfaithful to Georges and wishes to become reconciled with him. Their friend Thérèse brings about the reconciliation, but meantime Georges falls in love with her. Suzanne learns of this, and is at first not inclined to forgive her husband; then, as Georges makes it clear to her that his "slip" was momentary, accidental, that he will ever after be a model husband, Suzanne gives in. Here is no mystery, here are few opportunities for the "grand style!" What could Bernstein have done with this plot?

In *Le Pardon* Lemaître has voluntarily done away with such moving scenes as are ordinarily called "effective." In the story he conceived he might have made room for many of these, but he preferred to enter into a detailed analysis of the three characters he chose to treat. With a keenness and austerity closely akin to the literary hauteur of Paul Hervieu, he has applied himself solely to inquiring into the thoughts and feelings of Suzanne, Georges, and Thérèse. In brief he says: Here is what happens every day; it is not pleasant, it is not edifying, but it is life. I have attempted to use this episode and tried to demonstrate the subtle workings of the minds of these three people. If Suzanne is unfaithful to her husband, how will her action affect him? If, after her husband has forgiven her, on certain conditions, he is unfaithful to her, how will she feel? If each at last is equally guilty, will that fact bal-



ance accounts? Momentarily, it will, says Lemaître; but he pessimistically and truly adds that this unhappy couple is no more secure than they were when the play opened. Suzanne says as the curtain falls: "Oh, Georges, God have pity on us!" This is a step in advance of the solutions of the same problem offered by Hervieu and Porto-Riche — in *Les Tenailles* and *Amoureuse*. In *Les Tenailles* the unfaithful wife is riveted to her husband by circumstances. Her fault is learned years after, when it is too late for her to remarry. In *Amoureuse*, she is brought closer to her husband, because only through her possible loss is he made fully aware of his love for her.

Lemaître has twice in his plays made use of verse. Two slight but very amusing satirical comedies mark his sole attempts in the realm of the purely fanciful: *La Bonne Hélène*, a two-act parody something in the manner of Meilhac and Halévy, and the comic opera, *Le Mariage de Télémaque*, in which Maurice Donnay was his collaborator. With such a combination it is no wonder that this delightful trifle enjoyed a long and successful run at the Opéra Comique.

The years between 1889 and 1896 were those in which Lemaître's development as a dramatist was most rapid; *Révoltée* is the weakest of the plays, and *Le Pardon* probably the most close-knit, best thought-out, and best constructed. This development of his dramatic sense practically stopped seven years after its inception; for in none of the three important plays which followed *Le Pardon* did he add materially to his skill as a craftsman, or his ideas. *L'Ainée*, *La Massière*,

and *Bertrade*, are the products of a man who has already said his say. Of these three the first is the most original. It is the story of Pastor Petermann, a stolid Swiss, who has six daughters "to marry off." "Think of it," he says, "six daughters to marry! It's a problem. I must show them off, give garden parties, teas, concerts; bring young men to the house, and hold them. Old Pastor Petermann's home has become a shrine of Love. But I find it all very pleasant, this contrast between the sacred mission of the minister of the Gospel and his preoccupations as father of a family." Here is a good subject for comedy, a splendid opportunity which the dramatist has not failed to grasp. The first two acts are among the best Lemaître ever wrote; but eventually he turns all his attention to *The Eldest Daughter* — *L'Aînée*. There is some resemblance to Marthe's situation in *Mariage blanc*, as little Norah steps in and appropriates Mikils, who has asked for the hand of Lia, the eldest. Lia has ever been the drudge of the family; her continual sacrifices have always been accepted as a matter of course. Five years pass; Lia is thirty. As before, she is the drudge, the servant of her sisters and their infant children. At last a friend of the family, Müller, a man of fifty, asks her to become his wife. She does not love him, but feels that she must take the chance. Just as she accepts his offer, the seventeen-year-old Dorothee exercises her youthful cunning, and wins Müller. The parents do not hesitate to agree to the match. In silence, Lia accepts defeat, until one day, at a garden party given by Dursay, a neighbor, she is astonished on being

asked to dance with the host's nephew. He has divined the innate charm of the Eldest and begins to make love to her in true romantic style. Dazzled for the moment by the unexpectedness of the young man's declarations, she goes with him into the pavilion. Someone outside calls for her. "If you go now," says Dursay, "you are lost." Terrified at the prospect, yet yielding to an instinct of blind fear of further trouble, she opens the door and calls, "Here I am!" Lia seems irreparably compromised; but, strangely enough, Norah and Mikils side with her and persuade the Petermanns that "Really, what irritates you is not what she has done . . . but the scandal." Madame Petermann agrees with Norah: "Don't you see, it is Lia's very innocence, her simplicity, that have been her undoing? Is it for us to be severe on her, us for whom she has sacrificed everything? . . . If Lia has sinned . . . it is our fault . . . we should take her to our hearts, protect her, and not allow her to suffer. That's what I think!" And the erring daughter is received again into the bosom of her family. The repentant Dursay makes an offer of marriage, which is at length accepted.

The end is a little banal, but a comedy must end in some way. The author was concerned with Lia, and we must admit that she is a well-drawn character.

*La Massière* is a play of temperament. The painter Marèze is guilty of "sentimental infidelity" to his wife in his relations with little Juliette, an assistant in his studio. Mme. Marèze, who suspects that her husband's interest in the girl is

more than platonic, extracts a promise from him not to receive her except in the studio, and during "business hours"; but a small crisis is brought on as she meets Juliette one day coming from Marèze's private studio in his home. The affair is simply one of sentiment, yet it assumes serious proportions in Madame's eyes. Their son Jacques, however, provides a solution to the problem. Meeting Juliette one day by chance, he falls in love with her, and tells his parents not long after of his wish to make her his wife. Marèze is deeply troubled, and opposes the marriage from selfish motives; but his wife, seeing the truth of the matter — that Jacques' marriage will put an end to the other affair — brings the two together and induces her husband to give his consent.

The plot again is weak; it does not progress; but the idea, like that in the perennially charming *Été de la Saint-Martin* of Meilhac and Halévy, the attack of "Indian Summer" which comes to men of middle age, and the manner in which it is worked out, make it one of Lemaître's most delightful plays.

*Bertrade* (1905) is the latest play.<sup>1</sup> The Marquis de Mauferand, deep in debt, has a daughter, Bertrade, who can be the means of saving her father and establishing him comfortably for the remainder of his life, if she will only consent to become the wife of a rich and unscrupulous banker, Chaillard. But she refuses, in spite of the imprecations and threats of the Marquis. There is one last means: the Marquis can, by mar-

<sup>1</sup> *La Princesse de Clèves* was written about the same time, presumably. It has not been produced.

rying a former mistress, the Baroness de Rommelsbach, reestablish himself and pay all his debts. Again Bertrade steps in, convinces her father of the utter shame of the transaction, and persuades him to refuse. This he does, but, as there is no solution left, he kills himself. This is again a rather meretricious story, and would have little value were it not for the study afforded in the character of Bertrade. The dramatist's mistake is in beginning his play either too soon or too late. Bertrade is too busy doing things to allow us to see very much of her personality. She begins to interest us just as the curtain falls, and we must rely on our imagination to fill out the sketch. Had Lemaître begun his play at this point, we might have had another complete, sympathetic and illuminating picture to place with Suzanne, and Lia, and Frida. As it is, he has given us the ghost of a play, a clever sketch with a melodramatic plot.

The very openness of mind of Jules Lemaître, his freedom from prejudice, his admirable integrity, render impossible any categorical summing up of his philosophy of life. He is at once skeptic, believer, poet, politician, Republican, and Royalist. If, in the realm of the drama, he has failed to maintain so high a standard as some of his contemporaries, if in the final analysis he cannot be considered a playwright whose total output entitles him to a place in the front rank, he has at least contributed to the drama of his generation one play unsurpassed of its kind.

Early in August, 1914, Lemaître died.

## ALFRED CAPUS

ALFRED CAPUS once said in an address on "Our Epoch and the Theater" that the society of to-day does not readily lend itself to the dramatist because, "to use a metaphor from photography, it will never sit still long enough to be snapped." M. Capus was surely too modest, for if there is one photographer agile enough to take snapshots of contemporary French society, it is the author of *La Veine*. The infinitely varied and complex life of the past twenty-five years has found in the plays of this man its most complete and faithful external expression—the life of Paris, that is. In the works of no other present-day French dramatist have we such broad and detailed portraits of the boulevardier, the bourgeois, the *femme du monde*.

The "smiling optimism" of this son of Provence is not immediately observable in the man's personal appearance. One morning, just after the première of his latest play, I paid him a visit in his sumptuous apartment overlooking the Champ de Mars. Into the large library came a small, unwell-looking man, with thin, carefully brushed hair and a neatly trimmed black beard, wearing a pink dressing-gown. He excused himself saying that he was suffering from a severe cold, and sat back in a chair with a weary sigh. But



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the moment he spoke, I could observe his essential kindness and good-nature, which not even the ravages of a Parisian autumn cold could impair. His fine forehead, deep and penetrating black eyes, the mobile lines about the mouth, bespoke the satirist, while the smooth and gentle voice gave evidence of that optimism which is the keynote of all his work. And yet there was something in the quiet manner and unemphatic way of speaking which might lead one to assume that he was anyone but the author of the bubbling *Deux Ecoles*.

The life of Alfred Capus is quite in accordance with his appearance; it has been devoid of all adventure; full of trials, it is true, but with no violent struggles, no tragedies. It is like that of many of his contemporaries: first a long period of training for a profession never to be pursued, an apprenticeship in the newspaper world, discouragement, and finally, success.

Capus was born at Aix, Provence, in 1858. His primary education was received at Toulon; at the age of fourteen he went to Paris, where he continued his studies. There he made the acquaintance of that brilliant city in its prime, when the boulevards were at the height of their splendor. Like Maurice Donnay, the future dramatist of the boulevards entered a school which was to prepare him to follow a technical profession, only Capus planned to be a mining engineer. But a few years' half-hearted study and his failure to receive the coveted certificate, convinced him that his parents had been unwise in urging him into the

paths of practical science. The attractions of "La Ville lumière" proved too much for him. His natural inclinations, coupled with the driving necessity of making a living, resulted in his first attempt in the field of authorship. In collaboration with L. Vonoven he wrote *Les Honnêtes gens*, a little collection of stories and short sketches. The following year the same pair of young authors produced a play — *Le Mari malgré lui* — at the Théâtre Cluny. The next three years Capus spent in looking for a permanent position, and we may well believe that the indigent young man underwent many privations. Discouraged at length, he decided to leave his native country and go to foreign lands, there to resume the profession for which he had half-prepared himself at the technical school. But just at the right moment he was lucky enough to come into a small sum of money which "permitted him to wait a little longer."

With the assistance of his friends Paul Hervieu and Marcel Prévost, he was given a position on *Le Clairon*, a newspaper. It is curious to note that among his first contributions to this organ was one on the death of Darwin, in 1882. No one else on the staff had the temerity to write the few dozen requisite lines. The following year Capus was offered a slightly better position on Octave Mirbeau's new review, *Les Grimaces*, an offer which the struggling journalist was not slow to accept. At this early date some of those qualities of irony and Gallic wit began to appear in his "stories," qualities which he was later to develop

and use to great effect in his more mature works. *Le Gaulois* shortly after became the scene of his activities; here he set himself consciously "blaguer les hommes et les choses," for he was fast becoming what in his earlier years he had aspired to become: a boulevardier. Capus had now begun to attract some attention, and in his various contributions — to *L'Echo de Paris*, *La Revue bleue*, and *L'Illustration* for example — little dialogues, scenes from every-day life, sketches of a political and satirical nature, he proved that he had a personality as well as a very clever manner of exploiting that personality. A lightness of touch and compactness of phraseology distinguished the young man's style. By the time his first play of any note was produced he was independent and fairly prosperous, especially as he entered the staff of the *Figaro*<sup>1</sup> that same year. Meantime, he had been writing novels and stories. *Qui Perd Gagne*, *Faux Départ*, *Monsieur veut rire*, and *Années d'aventures* give sufficient evidence of the assiduity with which the journalist strove to enter the field of letters. These novels, while they were not immediately successful, were for the most part well received, and still hold a position of honor among the "best-sellers" of the past two decades.

In 1894 *Brignol et sa fille* was produced at the Vaudeville. The play ran for only eight nights, yet its revival seven years later at the Odéon proved that the first-night judgment was an incorrect one. This slight but delightfully droll com-

<sup>1</sup> Of which he is now co-editor with Robert de Flers.

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edy treats of an honest thief who, by means of his overwhelming "nerve" and the willing coöperation of his attractive daughter, borrows large sums of money, embezzles, lies, cheats, with perfect complacency. With unswerving faith in the eternal fitness of things, he lives in the belief that "everything will turn out all right in the end." And it does. The opening scene gives us immediately the keynote to Brignol's carefree character.

CONCIERGE. I've just seen the landlord, Monsieur. He refuses to wait another instant. I ought to say, too, that he is very angry.

BRIGNOL. That will all be arranged.

CONCIERGE. This is the first time a tenant has been three terms behind.

BRIGNOL. It's not serious.

CONCIERGE. Monsieur will allow me to recall the fact that in a day or two —

BRIGNOL. What?

CONCIERGE. The bailiff! You've already received the first notice, and that means —

BRIGNOL. Do you imagine I don't understand all about such things? I know more than the landlords do: I'm a lawyer —

CONCIERGE. I'll go, then —

*Enter MADAME BRIGNOL.*

Then you haven't anything special for me to tell the landlord, have you?

BRIGNOL. Say I'll pay him to-morrow.

CONCIERGE. To-morrow, without fail? They'll start taking your property —

BRIGNOL. They'll do nothing of the kind.

CONCIERGE. Humble servant — Monsieur — Madame — [*He goes out.*]

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MADAME BRIGNOL. Have you seen all those people you had to see?

BRIGNOL. Never fear: I have two or three affairs in hand now that are bound to succeed.

MADAME BRIGNOL. Remember how last time you were counting on two or three affairs, and we didn't pay then!

BRIGNOL. That has nothing to do with the case. Don't worry. We have the money — practically. . . .

The element of luck is everywhere observable in the plays of Capus. One play, *La Veine* — *Luck* — contains as its essence the theme that luck is the very basis of life. With confidence, impudence, and something agreeable in one's make-up it is possible to make a way in the world on "nerve." But one must be clever enough to seize the opportunity. Brignol is a charming fellow, a sympathetic crook; because he never allows an opportunity to slip by, and because he has on his side that elusive entity called luck, things do "turn out all right in the end."

He was something of a new creation, a novelty for the theatergoers of the early 'nineties, although to the American of to-day he may perhaps appear a trifle pale before the exaggerated Jimmy Valentines and rough diamond heroes.

*Brignol* was followed by *Rosine*, a comedy of a more serious nature; it did much to establish its author as a "rising dramatist." One critic of high authority, Gustave Geffroy, affirmed that *Rosine* was a "deft study of provincial manners, written on broad lines. In this sense, it is a true piece of work, complete and well thought out.

It presents at the same time a section of humanity and an author. The treatment of that section of humanity gives evidence of scrupulous care, a desire to enter into the field of actual experience, and make us feel when and how the action begins, develops, and is carried to a logical and fitting close." *Mariage bourgeois*, *Petites folles* and *Les Maris de Léontine* are rather in the manner of *Brignol* than of *Rosine*; each in turn, especially *Les Maris de Léontine*, added to the popularity of the author. *La Bourse ou la vie* likewise achieved success, but as yet Capus could scarcely be considered an eminent playwright. To establish him firmly a great success was necessary; this came in 1901, when *La Veine* was for the first time seen at the Variétés. Capus is still occasionally spoken of as "the author of *La Veine*." In this brilliant comedy many of his best qualities as a dramatist and commentator on human nature were brought to their fullest development: adroitness of touch in the conducting of individual scenes, ability to tell a moving and interesting story, power to make clever dialogue serve as many ends as possible. Here these qualities he molded into a charming and harmonious whole. That fatalism which lay at the bottom of the character of *Brignol*, and which runs through many of Capus' plays, is the actual theme of *La Veine*. In the words of one of the characters is this theme condensed: "I am not superstitious, but I believe that every man with a little intelligence, who is not too much of a fool and is not too timid, has in his life his hour of luck, when all men seem to work for him, where the fruit actually comes within his reach,



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so that he has but to pluck it. . . . Little Charlotte, no matter how patient we are, how brave, or how hard we work, we cannot force that hour. . . . It strikes from a tower we cannot see, and so long as it has not sounded for us, all our talents, all our virtues, count for nothing." And the play is simply an illustration of this philosophy. Bréard and Charlotte are carried along high on the wave of luck which they have been wise enough to see and use to their advantage.

*La Petite Fonctionnaire*, another of Capus' most brilliant successes, is at the same time one of his most typical works. Although it is perhaps not so well sustained throughout as the play which preceded it, it contains a number of pictures of provincial life which are quite as amusing. An attractive young girl, Suzanne Borel, forced to make her own living, fills a position in the post-office of a small provincial town. As she is good-looking, and somewhat "accomplished," she is looked upon by the conventional inhabitants as a dangerous citizen, especially as some of the husbands take rather too much interest in her welfare. First a wealthy man of the town offers to support her in Paris; she accepts the offer, and allows her benefactor merely "to touch the tips of her fingers." Then comes the Viscount, who is unhappily married; Suzanne accepts the favors of the young nobleman, who divorces his wife and finally marries his mistress. The plot is nearly as artificial and impossible as any Charles Klein ever conceived, but there is a fund of observation

and a consummately well executed picture of peasants and petty railroad officials, set pleasantly within the frame of a country post-office. The charm of the comedy lies in particular scenes, of which the following is an example (Suzanne is questioning the postman as to the effect she is producing on the worthy citizens) :

SUZANNE. I hope this reform has pleased the people?

POSTMAN. Oh, some like it, some don't.

SUZANNE. What? Don't some like it?

POSTMAN. Some people never do seem satisfied. They ask for reforms, and when they get 'em, they say it upsets their way of doin' things. Now, for instance, they used to get their papers from Paris the mornin' after, and have 'em to read at breakfast; now they have 'em at six in the evenin'—

SUZANNE. To read at dinner!

POSTMAN. Yes, but you see, they're not used to that—don't like it. There're some gentlemen don't want their news too soon.

SUZANNE. Tell me, the people here don't think much of me, do they?

POSTMAN. Oh, yes—oh, yes—they do you justice, Mademoiselle. They think you're very nice, only—

SUZANNE. What do they object to? I'd so like to know.

POSTMAN. Well, they think it's a little queer that a lady in the post-office plays the piano. . . . Ye know, Madame Broquet didn't have a piano, and they wonder why you have one—?

SUZANNE. But Madame Broquet was deaf; they don't want me to be deaf, do they?

POSTMAN. Then—well—the portraits—

SUZANNE. What portraits?

POSTMAN. Those Mademoiselle draws.

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SUZANNE. The idea! . . . Last Sunday I went to sketch the bridge — there were twenty children around me.

POSTMAN. They told about it — You see, then? Piano, drawing, that's all a bit —! Well, I'll be going now.

Antoine Benoist (in *Le Théâtre d'aujourd'hui*) happily compares this humorously realistic dialogue with that of Brieux, the Brieux of *Blanchette*, but he takes Capus to task for not attacking the question of how is a young girl, left to her own resources, to make an honest living? Perhaps that is too much to ask of a dramatist whose purpose it has always been to amuse, and who has succeeded so well. The question just touched upon by Capus in *La Petite Fonctionnaire* was dealt with much better by Brieux in *La Femme seule*, some eleven years later.

Divorce has always been an attractive and exceedingly fruitful subject for dramatists. In France it has offered occasion for some of the brightest comedies, like *Divorçons!* as well as half a dozen thesis plays of serious import and occasionally one of tragic depth. Capus' *Les Deux Ecoles* gives us a comic picture of divorce, the basis of which is not far different from a number of thesis plays by Hervieu and Brieux. Only Capus' object is amusement pure and simple; he preaches no sermon, he proves no thesis. The brilliant scenes in the café, the clever characterization, the quick and compact story, render this play one of Capus' best achievements.

The inconsequence, the fun, the biting yet some-

how good-natured satire, are the chief charm of this dramatist's work. Had he only adhered to this style of play, had he not deemed it wise to become ambitious and go far afield where he was out of his element, he would have spared himself some failures and at least a temporary loss of popularity. It is not hard to imagine a Capus hero saying something like this: "Ambition is the most fruitless of man's attributes. Why should I be troubled with this hideous feeling? If I can cultivate the art of charming, and make my living without working for it, why on earth should I do more?"

In the small group of serious plays, Capus seems rarely himself; *Notre Jeunesse*, *Les Deux Hommes*, *L'Oiseau blessé*, *L'Attentat*, *L'Adversaire*, *L'Aventurier*, and *Hélène Ardouin* are, in spite of many admirable scenes, not in the best manner of their author. *La Châtelaine*, a sentimental comedy in which the reformation of a hardened *roué* is literally forced down our throats, seems to be the work either of a young author or the sign of repentance of an old hand. It properly belongs with the "nice" plays of Flers and Caillavet and Maurice Donnay. But among these serious plays are two which merit special attention: *L'Attentat* and *L'Aventurier*. The first of these is valuable for a number of deft character touches, the second because it is Capus' most successful attempt in a realm where he has scarcely ever been at his ease. The Frenchman is in his element when he can depict with wit and satire the intimate life of his Paris; Capus is in this regard the typical

Frenchman, but in *L'Aventurier* he wished to portray the adventurer-type, which has much in common with the English and American captain of industry. In a Somerset Maugham or a Henry Arthur Jones play, there often appears a character who has "made good" in Africa or our own Wild West, and who returns to the "decadent" society whence he fled, "years before." The dramatist's purpose is usually to contrast the rugged strength of the adventurer with the effete representatives of our social life of the day. The French audience evidently likes to see these contrasts, for in the realm of their drama at least, the contrast is the more striking, as their society (again in the realm of their drama) is so artificial, so vastly different from that of the adventurer. When, therefore, a dramatist like Bernstein or Capus or Brieux introduces a discoverer, a captain of industry, the French audience is inclined to look upon the character as something of a prodigy. For this reason, then, this play of Alfred Capus attained a fair success; also, because Lucien Guitry acted the part of the adventurer. The play, while it is not typical of Capus' total output, is typical at least of one side of his talent. In this piece we may study his technical methods, if not his mordant wit and irony, and observe his powers of telling an interesting story, if not enjoy a picture of contemporaneous manners.

When an author has been on the wrong track for some time, when critics and public allow him to see that he has ceased to be his old self, he sometimes returns to the old manner. If he be,

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like Capus, a skillful dramatist who knows what the public wants, one who has been a public favorite, who has always known how to attract and hold his audiences, he will almost certainly make up for lost time. This fertile dramatist, during the years while he was attempting to enter regions which were not for him, tried from time to time to redeem himself, as it were. In *Monsieur Piégois* and *Un Ange*, the tone is not too serious, yet in spite of a few scenes reminiscent in spirit of *La Veine* and *Brignol et sa fille*, these plays are not of great importance.

But in the Fall of 1913, Capus returned to his brightest manner in *L'Institut de Beauté*. This is scarcely more than a sketch, in which the old Capus characters — the bourgeois who writes poems, his wife who runs a beauty shop, the inevitable duchess and the unlosable lover — run through the old Capus situations. The best scene in the play is the second act, in the beauty shop. This is a genre picture, something in the manner of the first act of Pinero's *The Gay Lord Quex* and the same author's *Mind-the-Paint Girl*.

Yet Capus seems to have lost something of the old verve. Perhaps he has paid the penalty for writing his best play too early in his career: his "veine" has possibly left him, for he has just been consecrated as one of the Immortals. His election to the Académie Française in the spring of 1914 seemed like a reward for the polished and finely written *Institut de Beauté*; the freshness and youthful buoyancy of the early works were not



sufficient grounds for the granting of immortality.

In forming any critical judgment of Capus' work, we should of course take into account only the seven or eight really significant plays; if we think of the author of *La Veine*, *Brignol et sa fille*, *La Petite Fonctionnaire*, *Les Deux Ecoles*, *Rosine*, *Les Maris de Léontine*, then the words of Jules Lemaître are unquestionably applicable: "M. Alfred Capus is an original, 'pacific,' sure writer. In a word, he is a realist, and a true one — a rare thing nowadays. For his realism is not tangled up with Naturalism, nor pessimism, nor artistic 'writing,' nor ready-made 'Parisianism,' nor is he concerned with a mania for psychological analysis, nor the desire to shock and astonish us: he is quite unpretentious. He sees clearly, and tells us plainly what he sees; that is all. A natural and quiet teller of stories, exact, scarcely ironical. I have before said that by reason of his tranquillity and his clarity he reminded me of Alain Le Sage. I shall not retract what I have said. Yes, the more I think of it, the more inclined I am to the belief that his originality lies in the fact that he is a realist in the classic manner: a realist pure and simple, not brutal, not evangelical, not bitter, not moral, nor even immoral. But just because he sees life itself and goes almost always to the average reality (the average is not brilliant, no! but it is infinite) the work of M. Capus appears vastly more significant than the great mass of Parisian goods and psychological studies of greater renown."

## HENRY BATAILLE

THE Midi — that sunny Midi which gave to France Alphonse Daudet, Frédéric Mistral, and Jean Aicard — was the birthplace of the sensitive and highly impressionable poet, Henry Bataille. In the same ancient city in which the author of *Tartarin* first saw the light, Nîmes, was born in 1872 the author of *La Femme nue*. Although the removal of his family in 1876 to Paris took the child out of his native haunts, he has since so often revisited them that he may be rightly considered a child of the South. The child's early and lasting impressions received from nature, his almost morbid preoccupation with himself and his thoughts, the deep sorrow caused by early bereavements, find expression in his first published work, *La Chambre blanche*, which made its appearance in 1895. It is a slight volume of intensely subjective poems. These verses, youthful and crude in places, naïve and sincere always, attracted some attention, for they constituted a little revolt against the Neo-classicists who held sway at the time. The following lines, evocative of that spirit in nature which was so dear to a poet like Wordsworth, show something of the poet's delicacy of feeling.

Voyageur, voyageur de jadis qui t'en vas  
A l'heure où les bergers descendent des montagnes,

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Hâte-toi! les foyers sont éteints où tu vas,  
Closes les portes au pays que tu regagnes;  
La grande route est vide et le bruit des luzernes  
Vient de si loin qu'il ferait peur . . . dépêche-toi.

Bataille was educated at Paris and Versailles, but those frequent sojourns in the South kept him, as I have suggested, a true son of his native Midi. In 1890 he determined to become a painter and entered accordingly the Académie Julian, where his aptitude marked him out as the probable winner of the coveted Prix de Rome.

But an accident prevented his obtaining the prize, for in 1894 his first play, *La Belle au bois dormant*, was produced by Lugné-Poé at his Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. This fairy play was written in collaboration with Robert d'Humières. Perhaps the most valuable lesson for Bataille in this production was received as a result of his preoccupation with the mounting; it made him familiar with the practical side of producing. Had he continued to spend so much time and energy on this side of the profession, bringing to it his painter's sense of proportion and appropriateness, France might have had one dramatist less to-day but, what is more needed, an intelligent and progressive producer. That opposition in France to much that is new in the theater, that obstinate refusal to learn that the stage is not still an eighteenth century institution, had rarely been so manifest as at the first production of *La Belle du bois dormant*. It was hissed by the audience and damned by the press. The author, it was predicted, would never write anything else. To-day

the author is one of France's acknowledged gods of the playhouse, to whom the press and the public are especially and at times blindly cordial.

This early discouragement nearly turned Bataille into other fields, when encouragement of the finest kind came from Marcel Schwob, poet, critic, and correspondent of Stevenson's. Schwob, who had heard Bataille read some of his childhood verses, urged him to publish them. This the young poet did; the result was *La Chambre blanche*. "This little white book," wrote Schwob in his preface, "stammering, trembling with apprehension, with its little maids painted like pictures in a picture-book, with its prim and mannered words, its phrases delicately enameled as by the hand of some old nurse, its poems laid out in fresh beds, half sleeping, dreaming of sweets, of princesses, of golden tresses and honey cakes . . ." he was proud and happy to introduce to the reading public.

Yet Schwob's encouragement did not lead Bataille to return at once to the theater, though it did much to soothe the feelings of the young poet. It was chance once more that directed him toward the footlights. For some time he held in reserve the completed manuscripts of two verse tragedies on legendary themes, *Ton Sang* and *La Lépreuse*. These he was persuaded to present in 1896 for the benefit performance of an aged actress, but so great was the success of the production that he at length decided to write plays in earnest.

Four years later his first prose play on a modern theme appeared. It was *L'Enchantement*.

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The moderate success which it achieved and the quantity of discussion it aroused, placed Bataille as among the "promising." *Le Masque* followed two years later, and in 1905 *Résurrection*, after Tolstoy's novel of that name; then his greatest successes, *La Marche nuptiale*, *Poliche*, and *La Femme nue*. Productions of *La Femme nue*, *La Vierge folle*, and *Le Scandale*, in England and America, have gone far to establish Bataille's international fame.

Bataille has been compared by his biographers and critics with Racine and Porto-Riche. The analogy in either case is clear, but not particularly apt: all three are analysts of love and its effect on the characters of strong women. But Racine by reason of his style and form, is so far from modern times that he can scarcely be compared with the moderns. Porto-Riche, on the other hand, is certainly a sensitive soul and an amorist, but Porto-Riche is a trifle too much concerned with the purely sexual side of his subject: he tends to be cloying. He is at times a satirist, a gentle satirist like Donnay. Bataille is rarely if ever satirical. He has Donnay's sentimental vein, something of Porto-Riche's power of analysis, and something besides of the psychologic insight of Racine.

Because of his strong inbred sense of the theater he resembles Bernstein. It is safe to predict of a new play announced by either author, that it will contain at least one tense emotional scene. But Bataille's unquestioned superiority over Bernstein rests in this fact: that whereas *Le Voleur* and *Israël* and *Le Secret* appear to be the contrivances of a writer striving for effect, the

“big” situations in *La Marche nuptiale* and *La Femme nue* and *Poliche* seem to grow of themselves. We cannot help thinking of the first act of *Le Voleur* — the adaptation entitled *The Thief* is well known in the United States — as so much preparation for that superb second act, but the third act of *La Femme nue* is the logical and almost unperceived outgrowth of the second, the second of the first. Baldly stated, Bataille works from the inside out, Bernstein in the reverse order. The result is that Bernstein’s method almost invariably succeeds — it is largely a matter of mathematics — while Bataille’s sometimes misses the point. One example will suffice: *Le Secret* — by Bernstein — and *Le Phalène* — by Bataille — are neither of them sound plays logically. Each is written upon the assumption of a false hypothesis. The heroine of the first is supposed to be driven by an abnormal hatred to commit a crime against her friend’s husband; the heroine of the latter to commit a crime against herself: in a moment of despondency she gives herself to the first man she meets. The Bernstein play enjoyed a fairly successful run in Paris, while *Le Phalène* filled scarcely fifty houses. Bernstein used all his theatric skill in order to construct — the term is peculiarly applicable — a big scene in the second act, but as the preparatory material was gleaned from a false hypothesis, the scaffolding was unsound. The scene did not ring true, yet so great was the sheer interest, and so great the art of Madame Simone, that the audience threw logic to the winds. Through pure genius Bernstein bolstered up a weak play. But Bataille, with a



play founded upon an equally false hypothesis, failed when he came to his big scene, because that scene fell intrinsically short of Bernstein's. Bataille failed because he was too much of an artist and too little a man of the theater. He simply could not create out of bad material. Bataille made a mistake, and failed honorably; Bernstein made one, and could not resist the temptation to patch it.

It is hardly necessary to enter upon the details of all of Bataille's plays; there is a certain similarity throughout. *L'Enchantement* is the story of a young woman who suddenly becomes aware of the immense power of love within her, and triumphs over adverse circumstances; *Maman Colibri*, an "unpleasant" play recounting the story of a woman who falls in love with one of her son's friends. It is, in the author's own words, a "study of the functions of woman throughout life." *Le Masque* is a love-story; the scene of which is laid in the theatrical world; *L'Enfant de l'amour*, *Les Flambeaux*, and *Le Phalène* are again love stories of some power; *La Vierge folle* is concerned with the abnormal adventure of an over-sexed young girl who eventually becomes crazed and commits suicide. But the best and most interesting and characteristic plays are *La Femme nue*, *La Mache nuptiale*, and *Poliche*. In these works the charm and poetry, and not too much of the purely theatrical side, of Bataille's genius will assure them recognition for years to come.

*La Femme nue* — literally *The Nude Woman*, — is one of the most deeply satisfying of all modern French plays. It is the simple story of a

young model who remains adorably feminine and natural while her husband, spoiled by his success, fails to appreciate her, and turns to another woman for consolation. Lolette comes to plead with her husband and the Princess who has taken her place in the affections of Pierre. The Princess sees that the situation is a critical one for the poor wife, and turns to Pierre:

PRINCESS. One of us must say adieu to you forever.

LOLETTE. Yes, but it can't be me. You haven't the right to leave me. What is to become of me, think! Take a lover? You have taught me to be constant, and now I couldn't love any one but you — make a living by going from one man to another? . . . No, thanks! I haven't the strength, or the courage. Run about the streets as I used to do? If you'd left me there, I might have done that — now I cannot. It's your fault: you've given me a conscience. What can I do, my God? . . . I've become at last the kind of woman you wanted me to be, and now I can't be the other kind.— It's all over! You have a duty to do: keep me. You will keep me —!

PIERRE. Now, now, talk to me about love if you like, but not duty! . . . I have made you, helped you rise in the world. I leave you on a higher level than when I found you. Life is richer in resources than you imagine. You can build up again your social position, find — as every one can — some one else to love, some one better than I. You will be happier, much happier.

LOLETTE. [*With a penetrating cry.*] Oh! You've condemned me, I feel it now! You've made your choice. Go and be happy with her, I know your heart now! Loulou's love is dead! Little Loulou! Your simple little Loulou! I've had you as she won't have you: I've had your youth, your misery and your poverty! We've gone through all that together. Those were the times —! When your trousers were ragged, when you didn't have

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four shirts to your name — . . . I was the woman you needed then! I've given you all my best years — I should have given you my whole life — Oh, Pierre, what have I done to you? [*She bursts into loud sobs.*]

PIERRE. My dear little girl, if you knew how you are torturing me!

LOLETTE. [*Clinging to his arm.*] But it's not possible! You see? He has pity on me! You're not going to take him from me — you're not going to take him from me! You can't know what you're doing! . . . Oh, if I could only love him, caress him! Or be near him! Call him Pierrot! The sweetest name in the world! When I go home now, to-night, I couldn't bear the idea — that — that you won't answer my call. — Don't do it! Don't do it! Pity me, here I am on my knees [*To the PRINCESS*] Madame, I'm not crying now, I'm not threatening — I'm begging you: have pity on me! I can't live without him. . . . Do what you want with me! Come, come with me, Pierre! Dearest, sweetest, don't you love me? Only — a little? Come, let's go home! [*She is on her knees; her head is bowed, her voice broken. She is a human rag. PIERRE tries to raise her, but she resists.*]

PRINCESS. I have no wish to cause such unhappiness — Monsieur Bernier, you are free —

LOLETTE. See, Pierre, she says it herself! It was a horrible dream! Come, come, it's all over now: let's go home. [*She grasps his arm and drags him with her. The PRINCESS gets his hat and is about to give it to him. PIERRE makes a little negative gesture to the PRINCESS, which does not escape LOLETTE. She then rises and addresses the pair.*] Ah, I saw you! You made her a sign to keep still! I was on my knees. . . . You're determined, both of you. . . . I saw it, I saw it! Oh, I hate you, I hate you! You'll see, you'll see. You, Princess, are no better than a dirty streetwalker, and you —!

PIERRE. Now, Loulou —

LOLETTE. I'll say what I want to say! I'm not

afraid of you! I'll resist. I'll resist.— [*Suddenly she stops short. For a few seconds she is silent, then with a little gesture expressing the greatest despair.*] No, now I understand — it's all over. If I suffered and tried every imaginable plan, I could only fail in the end. You'll do as you like. . . . It's all over with me. Now what do you want of me? To make you free? So that you can live happily? All right. Have you any ink?

PIERRE. Now what are you going to do? [*She goes to the table.*]

LOLETTE. Wait a moment — [*She writes, speaking aloud to herself.*] “Monsieur, I hereby file petition for divorce . . . against my husband, Monsieur Bernier. Please consider this application as definite.” [*PIERRE and the PRINCESS look fixedly at each other. It seems that each is looking for strength from the other, while LOLETTE, head bowed, eyes dry and clear, her face the picture of agony, is writing. Then PIERRE takes a step in her direction, but LOLETTE motions him away, without looking at him.*] Sh! — Now the address — just mail that — [*She rises, not looking at PIERRE or the PRINCESS.*] It's all over then, Pierre. That's what you wanted — There!

PIERRE. [*Taking up his hat and cane.*] Now, come!

LOLETTE. [*As PIERRE is about to follow her, she motions him out of her way with a sweeping gesture.*] Now I order you not to follow me! It's all over — you have what you wanted! — No, no, I don't want to hear you behind me! Nothing more! Nothing more! It's over!

PIERRE. Where are you going?

LOLETTE. [*Not turning around.*] Oh, what difference does that make to you — now? [*She goes out. The door closes. PIERRE looks at the PRINCESS, his eyes filled with sorrow.*]

Loulou attempts suicide, but succeeds only in wounding herself. The curtain of the final act rises on

the room in the hospital where she is convalescing. The bitterness of the loss of her husband and the events immediately following are over, and Loulou is at least temporarily calm. The Princess and even Pierre himself come to visit her. Pierre now has only an affectionate regard for his former wife. "Oh, how I wish," he tells her, "I could love you as I used to, Loulou, as you now love me — but if I can't I can't. It must be! If a wish could make my love live again, it *would* live! You would be the happiest of women." And she replies, "I feel how deeply you suffer in not being able to love me, Pierrot —" . . . Pierre continues, "It's a terrible thing to see a former love dying in oneself — like a child you want to help. When you say to it, 'Little one,' it disappears in your arms the harder you press it. . . . (*Pierre's body is shaken with grief.*) Yet it's not my fault."

LOLETTE. I understand; I know what efforts you are making. You *are* struggling! You needn't explain; your face is enough. Oh, Pierre, God preserve you from seeing the expression on the face of a woman who doesn't love you any longer. It's agonizing!

PIERRE. I firmly believe we can be happy together. . . . You have had the best of me — we can't find our youth and our love again. Take what I can give you, and don't ask for more. I feel so deeply for you! I don't know what to call it, but if you can call it love, you don't know how happy I should be!

LOLETTE. I'm too — I'd like — I don't know what I want — air — rest —

PIERRE. I know how I'm torturing you — I'll get you those photographs — [*He gives her his hand.*] You don't blame me too much for what I've said?

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LOLETTE. No — and thank you! You've said things no one else ever dared say: you are frank. *You're* not terrible, Pierre; only love is! . . .

Pierre leaves. Rouchard, a former friend of Lolette, comes and persuades her to go with him. Lolette, in despair, gets up from her bed, and decides to go. The nurse, who comes in as Lolette is dressing, asks Rouchard what she is to tell Pierre when he returns. Rouchard replies, "Tell him that I have picked up the package he dropped on the road, and that I will carry it to its destination."

*La Marche nuptiale* is somewhat similar in theme and treatment: a young couple from the provinces come to Paris, fortified against the battles of life with a little money and infinite hope. They are truly happy for, in spite of a great opposition on the part of their respective families, they have chosen the desired course. The wife is tempted — then comes the tragedy. But the story matters little. In the earlier scenes the poet has drawn unforgettable scenes, charming in detail and firm in outline. In both these plays there is no solution, no answer to a question, no attempt to prove a thesis or set a problem. In this one respect, Bataille is like Ibsen; he may ask questions — any dramatist who goes straight to the life of his time for his material will do that — but he makes no attempt to answer them. In his well-known introduction to the volume containing *Le Masque* and *La Marche nuptiale*, he says: "The theater is decidedly not the place to expose ideas; it must merely suggest them. Plays ought



to have a theme somewhere, a philosophical underlying idea, just as clothes have well-concealed seams. If it is necessary for the dramatist to set forth an obvious idea, the audience ought not to be forced to accept it: the work must stand or fall on its own merits. Ideas are for us a side-issue, the main point is to give the spectator, through his senses, a more penetrating and more vivid view of life. . . . The personages of the play should act freely, according to their proper character, not according to the exigencies of the theme. They should carry on the play, not the play *them*." Ibsen said practically the same thing in a conversation quoted by Prozor, the French translator of Ibsen: "And I cannot help it if in my own brain as I write, various ideas take root. That is merely accessory; the first principle of a play is action, life."

The best plays of Henry Bataille are true "slices of life"; the "hanging" ends of *La Femme nue* and *Poliche*, where Loulou and Poliche continue drifting, as do Giulia and Tommy in Giacosa's *Come le Foglie*, are much nearer life than many of the forced dénouements of Hervieu and Brioux.

*Poliche*, while it does not treat in so serious a manner a question of such universal interest as *La Femme nue* or *La Marche nuptiale*, is without doubt one of the most pleasantly pathetic comedies of recent years; its theme, in the loose sense adopted in the author's definition, is similar to that of Donnay's *Amants*. It recounts the obstacles which arise sooner or later, and which lie in the way of the free-love union. *Poliche* is passion-

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ately in love with a woman whom he supposes cares for him only when he plays the buffoon. She learns afterward that he is at bottom serious, and the two go off into the country on their sentimental journey. But the specter of "society," ready to condemn — even in France — unions such as theirs, and the haunting fear of incompatibility, close round them, and the two separate. Seated in a dark little railway station, Rosine and Poliche await the train which is to take Rosine to Paris.

ROSINE. How stupid life is! How utterly stupid! Here we are within an ace of being happy! You have only to wish, perhaps — hold me by main force —!

POLICHE. I hardly think —

ROSINE. Dear friend, my only friend!

POLICHE. Above all, don't accuse yourself. . . . Ours is only a little story, nothing great — You're exquisite, that's certain. Charming, perfectly charming! [*He makes a vague gesture in the air.*] Like this — or like that! That's the main point.

ROSINE. You don't want *me* to stay with you!

POLICHE. No, no, I don't, *I* am putting an end to your happiness voluntarily. Repeat that to yourself, so that you shan't forget it, when you begin to feel remorse — later on — *I* wished it to be so —

ROSINE. Come with me just to Paris — won't you? Why not? Come! It's going to be so sad; the evenings, in our house here! You all alone! And our room! Come — you can take the train back to-morrow —

POLICHE. [*Shaking his head.*] No, mustn't —

ROSINE. . . . What'll our friends say, and the friends who are expecting you?

POLICHE. Bah! One Poliche is lost, ten new ones are found again. How many men are there like me who,

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for a year or two amuse Paris, break glasses at Maxim's — flash their way across the sky — as I have with you, and then leave —? I've had predecessors! And I'll have successors! . . . They have disappeared, as I'm disappearing: going back into circulation again. People imagine they've come to some romantic end. No, no, I know. They're where I am: at Lyon — or Bordeaux, selling wine. . . . Sundays they think of their youth — they think of you, Rosine.

ROSINE. Oh, Poliche! [*The waiter has turned on the gas, which illuminates the little bar.*] . . .

THE MAID. [*Entering.*] Madame, shall I take the valise?

ROSINE. Yes — [*The MAID takes the valise.*]

MAID. Shall I reserve a place?

ROSINE. Yes — and take the dog. [*The MAID takes the dog. . . . The train is heard in the distance.*] . . . The train? So soon?

MAID. They've called it.

ROSINE. Go now. [*The MAID goes out.*] Dearest! Dearest! My love! Take my hand! Press it, press it, hard! There! Now, look in my eyes — for a long time! [*She takes his hand and gazes at him. Her eyes are seen sparkling from under the heavy veil.*] Say: I love you!

POLICHE. I love you!

ROSINE. [*Sobbing.*] Adieu, Didier! — Why, why didn't you — want to come — with me? Why?

POLICHE. Sh! These aren't the things to say, dear, when we have only two minutes more together — two minutes! Listen! The train's nearer now!

ROSINE. My God, my God!

POLICHE. [*Gazing at her; softly, slowly.*] You are exquisite — [*An EMPLOYEE comes through the room. It has begun to rain outside.*]

ROSINE. Soon? Don't forget! At once?

POLICHE. Yes.

ROSINE. Send me a post-card to-morrow — and look

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out for your lame shoulder — don't stay too long in that damp house —

POLICHE. No, no — [*In the distance the signal over the tracks changes color. The train is heard entering the station.*]

EMPLOYEE. . . . Passengers for Paris! All aboard!

POLICHE. [*To the EMPLOYEE, in a loud voice.*]  
Does Madame have to cross the tracks?

EMPLOYEE. No, train's on the first track — left. . . .

POLICHE. You mustn't miss your train! [*He taps on a saucer, and the waiter comes.*] How much, garçon?

WAITER. Two Chartreuses — one franc twenty.

[POLICHE pays.]

MAID. [*Reëntering.*] It's begun to rain.— Does Madame want me to take out an umbrella? . . .

ROSINE. Now, you go on ahead — [*Passengers are seen getting into the train, outside.*] I can't! I can't! [*She is choked with sobs.*]

POLICHE. Come, we must separate here! That's better. I shan't take you to your compartment.

ROSINE. Why?

POLICHE. No — a man crying! It's ridiculous — people would laugh. . . . I'm afraid — Here's your train now.

ROSINE. Didier — [*They rise.*]

EMPLOYEE. [*Shouting outside.*] All aboard for Paris! All aboard!

POLICHE. Here, don't forget the little bag. Come now, just one little smile, Rosine! Adieu — my life!

ROSINE. No, no, no, don't say that! I'll see you soon!

POLICHE. Yes. [*They kiss, simply.*] Adieu, Rosine.

ROSINE. I, I — [*She wants to say something, but is unable. She is again convulsed with sobs.*] . . .

EMPLOYEE. [*Outside.*] All aboard! All aboard!  
[ROSINE disappears through the door. Then POLICHE stands in the doorway, dazed, his eyes riveted in the di-

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rection of the train. Then, timidly, awkwardly, he takes out a little pink handkerchief, and waves it two or three times in the air. The train whistles. As he turns to go, head bowed, collar up-turned, his hat over his eyes, he jostles a man who is late for the train, and knocks his cane out of his hand.]

THE PASSENGER. [*Gruffly.*] Can't you look out?

POLICHE. [*Stoops down, picks up the cane, gives it to the man and, smiling through his tears, says:.*] Pardon!

For some years Bataille made no use of his gift for poetry, but in his slight and short dream-play, *Le Songe d'une nuit d'amour*, he proved that he could adapt to the dramatic form those free and supple meters which are among the chief charms of *La Chambre blanche*.

Earlier in the present sketch I spoke of Bataille's abandonment of the practical side of stage management and remarked that had he continued to write fairy plays and interest himself in their artistic production, France might have been richer by one original producer. It is a hopeful sign that Bataille seems to be returning to his earlier manner. It happens that his three latest plays have been in prose and are in theme and treatment similar to the foregoing works, but he has two plays, both cast in poetic form and based on legends and stories — *Faust* and *Manon fille galante* — the production of which is attended with exceptional interest. Will the poet insist on a proper *mise en scène*, and not the usual "stock" setting, or has he become so successful of late that he leaves these details to the unimaginative manager?

## HENRY BERNSTEIN

BERNSTEIN'S chief claim upon our consideration in a volume of this kind is that he has always kept clear of the theater of ideas. The French drama of to-day, like that of most other European nations, is too busy propounding theses and ideas and too little occupied with the delineation of character for its own sake, and the writing of plays as plays. It is then almost a relief to come to a man of the theater, in the sense that Scribe and Sardou were men of the theater. It can with some justice be averred that no play worthy the name can be written without an idea at all, but he who wishes to furnish his audience with the requisite number of laughs and thrills will leave his ideas to be elucidated by the critics and the thinking part of his audience. Bernstein has ideas, but they rarely trouble him; he never sacrifices his play for their sake, as Brioux and Hervieu sometimes do. His ideas are merely accessory, and serve but to bind together a fabric which might otherwise fall to pieces.

Bernstein then is a born dramatist. For him, the play's the thing. Each of his plays is a situation with a plot, not a plot out of which the situation seems to develop of its own accord. The first act of a Bernstein play is usually the baldest sort of exposition and preparation. This drama-



tist has never failed to supply his audience with one overwhelming scene, one tremendous climax, so that if at times the first act tends to be dull, the audience, knowing its author, is willing to sit patiently until the *scène à faire*, confident of the reward awaiting it.

The Bernstein formula is so well fixed, there is so great a uniformity throughout his works, such similarity among the characters, that there is no necessity to more than outline his more important plays, and dwell upon the particulars of but one or two.

In 1900 his first play, *Le Marché*, was produced at the Théâtre Antoine. It was eminently successful, as were those which immediately followed it: *Le Détour*, two years later, and *Joujou*, produced the same year as *Le Détour*. *Le Bercail* and *La Rafale* were even more successful. In *La Griffé*, 1906, Bernstein attempts, with some skill, to analyze character. This psychological piece is the only one in which the author hesitates to attack the "big scene at the expected moment"; with the result that he falls between two stools. It must be conceded that Bernstein as a psychologist is decidedly inferior to Bernstein as a dramatist, and that his psychological bent led him astray as a dramatist.

*Le Voleur* — played in the United States in an adaptation known as *The Thief* — is probably the most celebrated of the Bernstein plays. In the "big" act, the second, the author is at his best. In this duologue, which occupies the entire act, is one of those powerful cross-examination, discovery-of-guilt-and-confession scenes which, though

he was not the originator, Bernstein has carried to its highest dramatic development. Beside this, the third act of *Mrs. Dane's Defence* and even the second act of *La Robe rouge*, appear a trifle pale. The second act of *Le Voleur* may be the sheerest bravado, but it is so consummately built, so well rounded out, so tense, stirring, crushing, that we can scarcely bring reason to bear while watching or even reading it. Here at last is that "struggle between conflicting wills" carried to the Nth; Brunetière could not but have admired the skill of the builder.

In the American productions of *Le Voleur*, *Israël*, and *Samson*, these plays were so adapted that very little of Bernstein remained. And Bernstein, as well as our producers, may be blamed for the cutting. This may well be a further illustration of Bernstein's business attitude toward his profession, yet we must lay the blame on our producers who rarely if ever allow us to see a foreign play as it was written. If they would once allow the foreigners to speak for themselves, I feel sure such plays as *Israël*, *Samson*, *La Vierge folle*, *La Flambée*, and *Pour Vivre heureux*, would not so soon come to grief. We should also have some fair idea as to what Bernstein, Bataille, Kistemaekers, and Rivoire are doing.

*Le Voleur* is the story of a woman who induces the eighteen-year-old son of her hosts, at whose home she is staying with her husband, to steal considerable sums of money. The youth is in love with Marie-Louise and she, who adores her husband, uses the money "to make herself beautiful in his eyes." Lagardes, the boy's father, has

put a detective on the case and, at the end of the first act, learns who the thief is. The second act is occupied with the explanation that takes place between Richard and Marie-Louise. It is past midnight. Richard, interested in the boy's confession, and struck with his explanation of how he opened the drawer where the bank-notes lay, tries the same experiment on a locked drawer in his own room. Marie-Louise, it is at once evident, wishes to conceal something from him, and his suspicions are aroused. He opens the drawer and finds a pocket-book. At first it appears to be empty, then he feels a packet of papers — bank-notes. Six hundred — no, six thousand francs! Where did she get so much money? Savings? There is a moment of suspense as Richard questions her. "Where did you get the money? Fernand didn't steal that money for himself? Or did *you* steal it too?" — "Fernand did not steal it." "Then —?" — "Fernand assumed the blame in order to save me! I stole the twenty thousand francs." — "Why did you steal it?" — "Because I adored you; I wanted to be beautiful to please you!" — "But why did Fernand acknowledge a theft of which he was innocent?" — "Because I asked him to." — "Where? When?" — "This evening, in the park." — "Why did he consent?" — "Because he loves me!"

And the play is over, yet the characters must be disposed of. The last act is feeble, because the whole situation, prepared for in the first, has been fully developed in the second. Fernand goes away to South America, Marie-Louise is forgiven, and calm reigns again.

Artificial as the action is, unsatisfying as its morality may be, *Le Voleur* is a vigorous play with one superlative act.

Bernstein sees the life about him from a far different angle from that of his contemporaries. Capus, Flers and Caillavet, and their followers, ripple the surface, and leave us with a certain feeling of optimism; Brioux and Hervieu dissect the minds and motives of individuals, dig deep to the roots of social evils, and tell us what is wrong in our social machinery, but Bernstein sees life in big situations. A strong man at variance with society, a woman who is unhappily married, a wife who steals and causes others to steal, in order to be more attractive to her husband; these conditions he synthesizes, without comment, without judgment, and shapes into plays.

*Samson* recounts the story of a terrible vengeance. Jacques Branchard, a former dock-porter of Marseilles, is one of those adventurers who through indomitable will-power have built up a large fortune and married into "society." Anne-Marie, his wife, has been forced to marry Jacques, in order to restore the ruined family fortunes. She is not long in seeking "consolation" elsewhere: she becomes the mistress of Le Govain. One night when Jacques is thought to have gone away the lover comes to Anne-Marie's home, and takes her to a restaurant frequented by demi-mondaines; but Anne-Marie is disgusted with the scenes of sickening debauchery, and leaves the place. At home, she meets her husband, who has been informed of the intended escapade, and remained in Paris. Refusing to explain her con-

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duct to her husband, she expresses no regret or no intention of giving up her lover. Meantime, Jacques plans his revenge. Not long after, he invites Le Govain to a private dining-room at the Ritz, and there tells him that he, Jacques Branchard, is causing the stocks which control the fortunes of both men, to drop to a point where they (Branchard and Le Govain) will both be ruined. The scene in the hotel is the expected "Bernstein scene." The fearful power of the vengeful Jew, and his repression in the presence of the helpless Le Govain, are depicted in the author's best manner. This new vengeance is quickly explained to the frightened victim:

JACQUES. Don't you understand yet? Ha! Le Govain, my dear friend, you are my wife's lover, and I am now ruining you. Now do you understand? . . . I don't want to fight a duel with you. I detest the rôle of victim! I consider it very stupid. I am now fighting with my own weapons, and on my own duelling-ground. We meet here in this room — this empty room. Call for help as much as you please, you will disturb no one. . . . Here are my arms and my fists to keep you with me; I tell you, I have often made use of them. But you're only a miserable little whelp, you can't even stand up! . . .

Le Govain ventures a remark about "honor."

JACQUES. Honor? To hell with honor! I have no honor. The suburb of Marseilles where I was born was called Thieves' Corner. People passing through it spat at it in sign of hatred. My father's house was our illegal pawn-shop. When I went to school my comrades formed bands to torture me. . . . I accepted their blows, and was afraid of them. Once — it was instinct — in a fight, I

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hit one of them. That day I forced them into a sort of complacent hypocrisy. That's been the way with me all my life. Hated by other men, I went among them with clenched fists . . . jaws set, threatened and threatening . . .”

Having ruined both himself and his victim, he turns to his wife, his last consolation, his last hope. He wants not only herself, but her esteem and her love.

JACQUES. Anne-Marie, I have loved you before I even met you . . . in the gutters of Marseilles, when I was a little street-urchin, I was troubled by an unforgettable passion. . . . A young woman of the aristocracy it was . . . long ago! Every day I watched her leave her home; she passed me, delicate, haughty, patronizing, she walked by the little fellow who lowered his eyes as she came near. Was he worthy even of that? . . . That image decided me. . . . When I began to think seriously about women, my desires went out to that vision of my youth. . . . Now what are you going to do? Leave me, as you have a right to do, or stay with me, in spite of the fact that I am ruined?

ANNE-MARIE. I shall stay with you. . . .

JACQUES. Will you love me — in time . . . ?

ANNE-MARIE. It is too early to say — yet.

*Israël* is one of the finest examples of pure drama of recent times. The second act, *the* act for which the play was written, is superbly constructed; the fluctuations of suspense, every imaginable surprise of which the situation is capable, are guided by the hand of a master craftsman. For simplicity, dignity, and power, the scene is of superlative merit.

The young Thibault, Prince de Cler, son of the



Duchess de Croucy, is a violent anti-Semite. One day, after instigating a brutal attack on the Jews, he plans, together with certain members of his club, to insult a Jew of the name of Gutlieb and demand his instant resignation from the club. Late in the evening, Thibault and his associates are gathered in the lobby, awaiting Gutlieb. As Gutlieb is about to leave, Thibault asks him to write out his resignation. The Jew refuses and is about to leave, when Thibault bars his way. Again Gutlieb tries to make his way out when Thibault knocks off his hat. In silence the Jew picks up the hat and goes. Gutlieb must either resign or fight a duel.

Beginning with his simple situation, Bernstein gradually builds up his scene. Hearing of the incident, Thibault's mother has asked Gutlieb to come to see her on the following day. We then learn that Thibault is the illegitimate son of Gutlieb and the Duchess. She begs Gutlieb not to fight with their son, but Gutlieb urges, justly enough, that his refusal will be interpreted as cowardice and reflect upon his party and race as well as upon himself. On the other hand, Thibault must not suspect that he is the son of the hated Jew. The mother is supplicating Gutlieb when — Thibault enters. Gutlieb retires, and mother and son are left together. The scene is ominous in its beginning. Why, asks Thibault, is his mortal enemy at his mother's home? The Duchess attempts to explain, but she evades the pointed questions of her son. The answers, most skillfully contrived, serve but to postpone the explanation and final revelation of the terrible secret.

The Duchess naturally wishes to have her son avoid a duel; that, in her eyes, is a crime, and this duel — out of the question! Thibault at length gives in and says: “Well, Mother, I make you a present of Gutlieb’s life: I’ll let the matter drop after I give him a mere scratch.” He is then about to confer with his seconds, when he returns to the Duchess. He has changed his mind; he must have further light on the subject. “But,” she replies, “I have explained everything.”— “No, you have merely pacified me: you have explained nothing. Why did you ask a favor of him, why did you have a Jesuit, Father Silvain, sent as our envoy to that Jew?” The Duchess, losing her presence of mind, says that Thibault is forgetting his duty as a son, that he must ask no further questions. He then tells her that his uncle informed him that Gutlieb was once a friend of hers; did his father perhaps borrow money of the Jew? Is she under any obligation to him? Again the distracted mother sees a method of escape in a lie. In trying to persuade her son of the fact that she is under no obligation to Gutlieb, she goes too far, and swears “By the Christ!” that there is nothing —! “You swear,” he says, “but what do you swear? That Gutlieb knows of no compromising secrets in regard to my father? Very well, but perhaps there are other secrets. I am going to ask him in person what those secrets are!” He attempts to go. As he is at the door, his mother screams. “Don’t go! Torture me if you want; ask me questions — I’ll answer!”— “No, Mother, you must tell me!” Then, little by little, she confesses: “Yes, since you must

know, when I was young and attractive, Gutlieb loved me, without daring to speak. To-day I took advantage of those old memories."—"You are mistaken, Mother, the Duchess de Croucy does not stoop to such devices. The victim is caught in the wheels—there is no way out."—She then confesses that she was herself deeply in love with Gutlieb. "Did that love remain absolutely pure? Will you swear *that* on the name of the Christ, as you just did?"—"No, I will not invoke His name in vain!"—"Mother, you should have sworn that!" He is about to go to Gutlieb, and again his mother stops him: "Poor boy, listen to me, look me in the eyes. You *cannot* strike that man!"—"You lie!" he shouts to her. But, realizing at length the horrible truth, he goes out, crushed.

There are situations and plays for which no dénouement exists. *Israël*, like Hervieu's *Le Dédale*, is one of these. The second act is the play. Reconciliation is of course out of the question, so that suicide is the only solution for Thibault. Were it not that audiences demand some sort of winding-up, some arbitrary termination to a story, Bernstein might better have closed his play on the curtain of the second act. The dénouement we must accept as we do that of a Molière farce.

The hypothesis of *Israël* is certainly possible, but hardly probable. It is very unusual. Given, however, the hypothesis, which the dramatist is careful to make plausible, the rest follows. If a criticism may be urged against the play as a whole, it is this.

The later works of Bernstein, after such plays as *Israël*, come as something of an anticlimax. *Après Moi!* is remembered mainly because of the disgraceful anti-Semite riots it aroused and which caused its withdrawal from the boards of the Comédie Française. It is a drama of passion not unlike the earliest plays. *L'Assaut* — played in the United States by John Mason as *The Attack* — somehow lacks the vigor of *Samson* and *Le Voleur* — while the last act is particularly weak. It contains what may be taken as biographical facts from the author's life, but this scarcely suffices to keep it alive. *Le Secret*, the latest play, has enjoyed only a moderate success, and that was due mainly to the superb acting of Madame Simone.

Adolphe Brisson, the erratic but clever critic of *Le Temps*, said of Bernstein: "In his plays there is not a ray of sunshine over the mud; not a flower blossoming in the sewer: no ideal, no sacrifice; over all is the dull satisfaction of the appetites, wallowing in the dirt; death, nothingness." Were Bernstein an avowed commentator on life, were he a dramatist of ideas, there might be some justice in M. Brisson's words, but, while he does people his works with characters for the most part whom "one would not care to meet," Bernstein should not be held too strictly to account for his subject-matter. Had the critic of *Le Temps* said that Bernstein was doomed to oblivion, owing to his preoccupation with sordid characters, his casting aside of any pretense to the expression of new ideas or to the depiction of good and noble types, he might have been nearer the truth.

## ROBERT DE FLERS AND GASTON- ARMAND DE CAILLAVET

ONE of the most successful of collaborations between dramatists is that of Robert de Flers and Gaston-Armand de Caillavet.<sup>1</sup> During the past fourteen years these "twin stars of the heaven" of light comedy have illuminated the boulevards of Paris and afforded light to most of the theatrical centers of the world. One collaboration recalls another, and the closest analogy to the pair in question is that of Meilhac and Halévy.

M. de Caillavet told me that these writers were in a manner an inspiration to him and his associate, that they at one time served as models, that — but M. de Caillavet is so delightful a *raconteur* that I shall permit him to tell, in what I recall of a pleasant conversation, of the débuts of himself and M. de Flers, their ideas, and something of their method of working. Seated in his magnificent mansion in the Avenue Hoche one morning, clothed in a plum-colored dressing-gown, a silk handkerchief wound about his neck, genial, refined, distingué, communicative and eager to answer questions and anticipate them, he told in somewhat the following words the story of that collaboration which, as he expressed it, was the happy

<sup>1</sup> Since the above was written, news comes that M. de Caillavet is dead (Winter 1915).

outcome of what seemed to him the mingling of "elective affinities":

"I wanted to enter the Ecole des Chartes and do historical research work; M. de Flers wished likewise to be a historian, but, as you see, Fate decreed otherwise. We first met in 1887, and each felt that the other was destined to be a life-long friend. It was not for some years to come that we actually wrote plays together; meantime we went our respective ways. I became a director of *revues*. The little theater where these were given was situated on the first floor of the Eiffel Tower. When I worked there, I received my first and in many ways most valuable criticism. You see, I had to go up in an elevator with my audience — and come down, too. That was the worst part of it. It was during those descents that I heard things about myself and my work, things that I blushed to learn — but I think I profited by the opinions thus expressed. From the little *revues* I turned my hand to farces, slight things for the most part, which were produced at the Palais Royal. Meantime, M. de Flers had entered the newspaper world (he is now dramatic critic on the *Figaro*<sup>1</sup>); he had also written a number of short stories and some travel books. In 1900 the time was ripe for us to join forces.

"That year we wrote a ballet comic opera, *Les Travaux d'Hercule*. We had the devil's own time getting it accepted, but finally one manager took it as a stop-gap, and incidentally made quite a success of it. Our next play, *Les Sentiers de la*

<sup>1</sup> After the assassination of Gaston Calmette, Robert de Flers and Alfred Capus were made joint editors of the *Figaro*.



*vertu*, was a prose comedy. Again, we had trouble getting the play produced, but its production was attended by some degree of success. Then we were on our feet." (And here modesty forbade M. de Caillavet's adding that the pair had never known a failure and that half a dozen of their plays had had several thousand nights' runs in nearly every country of the world).

"Like Meilhac and Halévy, we have attempted to write satirical comedies in a light vein; they are concerned with political and religious matters at times, and are often sentimental or burlesque in character. Until 1907 however, we were unable to carry our disrespect for things as they are very far into the political field, but since the abolishment of the censorship that year, we have done what I think is some of our best work. I have already said that we respected nothing — church, state, religious belief, or persons — and in *Le Bois sacré*, *L'Habit vert* and *Le Roi*, we have satirized in turn the Legion of Honor, the Académie Française, and the national custom of entertaining members of royalty who visit Paris. Had the censorship still been in working order these plays would never have been written.

"You may have noticed that our plays fall into more or less clearly defined groups: sentimental comedies, with tears and laughs — like *L'Amour veille* —, political plays — like those I have just referred to —, burlesques — like *Les Travaux d'Hercule* — simple comedies of manners — like *Papa, Miquette et sa mère*, *L'Eventail*, and *L'Ane de Buridan* — and so on. You understand, too, that there is a strain of philosophy running through

all these plays? We French must always have that. Underlying even the lightest of our farces, there is some definite 'theme,' shall I say? but we try to keep it well out of sight.

"Our system of collaboration works so well that I am really unable to say which part of a play is my own and which my partner's. In fact, we talk a plot over, one of us rejecting an idea, the other arguing in its favor. It is curious, but often one of these discussions ends by my accepting my confrère's proposal and rejecting my own, while he does the same with mine. When we come to the dialogue, we talk it to each other; thus is it *made*, not *written*. We have come now, partly as a result of our constant working together, partly as a result of our common tastes, to think as well as write as a single being.

"Precisely what our function in the contemporary French drama is I cannot say; I can only remark that we are attempting to paint in an amusing way the foibles and vices and affectations of our time. If the bulk of our work succeeds in depicting a certain section of the life of Paris, we have ample reason to be thankful."

That "necessary" philosophical strain to which M. de Caillavet referred, never seriously interferes with what this joyous pair consider their true function in the French drama of the day: amusement. Their plays contain only that basis, solid enough but not too much in evidence, which any good work based upon life must have in order to exist, such as Labiche infused into the best of his comedies. Flers and Caillavet never go too far, they are never so didactic as is Shaw even in the

least pointed of his comedies: *You Never Can Tell*. The philosophical foundation of *L'Amour veille* — it sounds ridiculous to speak of it! — is simply this: “A woman can be saved from infidelity only by love, not by the love which she inspires, but by that which she herself feels. It keeps watch over her. Only the diamond can ward off the rays of other diamonds. Love alone is strong enough to defend her against love.” This idea is surely not so recondite or original that we need fear its intrusion to the detriment of our enjoyment of the play. Flers and Caillavet know their own ability and their limitations so well that it is not likely that they will be tempted into the byways of the thesis play; they are wise enough to leave to Curel, Brioux, and Hervieu the serious analysis of human motives. From the very first they found their particular genre, or genres. Generally speaking, their work can be divided into two parts; in the realm of the sentimental are *L'Amour veille*, *L'Eventail*, *Papa*, *Miquette et sa mère*, *L'Ane de Buridan*, and *Primerose*; in the realm of the political, *Le Bois sacré*, *Le Roi*, and *L'Habit vert*.

*L'Amour veille* is one of the most popular comedies of the age. It is a stock favorite in France and Germany, and has been played in Italy, England, and the United States many hundreds of times. With its comfortable and gratifying “theme” — we should not inquire too closely into its truth — plenty of sprightly dialogue, sentiment in generous doses, a touch of wistful sadness (in the character of the book-worm Ernest) the play is wide in its appeal. The handsome André is

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married to the charming young ingénue Jacqueline, who idolizes her husband. She learns that he has been unfaithful to her, and in a fit of jealousy determines to follow Rebellious Susan and Françillon and pay André back in his own coin. The sympathetic pedant Ernest, who is in love with Jacqueline, is the man she chooses as the instrument of her vengeance. She writes him a note telling him to expect her in his study at eight o'clock in the evening. The first part of the third act, in Ernest's study on the appointed evening, is one of the prettiest and most amusing scenes these authors have ever written. The awkward preparations made by the historian, his elation at being finally loved by a beautiful woman, the timidity of Jacqueline, are in the highest vein of light comedy.

ERNEST. Let me — let me — take you in my arms —

JACQUELINE. Yes — do!

ERNEST. Let me kiss you!

JACQUELINE. Yes, yes, do that — do everything —

ERNEST. My dearest — what joy, what happiness —  
[*He kisses her.*]

JACQUELINE. [*Running from him.*] No, no, no, no — leave me, leave me —!

ERNEST. [*Following her.*] Jacqueline! Jacqueline!

JACQUELINE. No, no, don't!

ERNEST. Jacqueline!

JACQUELINE. [*Terrified.*] Leave me! [*She climbs to the top of the step-ladder which leads to the highest part of the bookcase.*]

ERNEST. . . . I had imagined a different sort of rendezvous from this!

JACQUELINE. [*After a pause.*] Ernest —

ERNEST. What?

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JACQUELINE. Ernest, I'm dizzy.

ERNEST. Come down, then —

JACQUELINE. I can't. I'd rather stay here, always — But don't worry, my dear, I'm firmly resolved. I'll be yours — but don't ask me to budge from here! I could never do it.

ERNEST. Come down, Jacqueline.

JACQUELINE. Then help me.

ERNEST. Now! Close your eyes.

JACQUELINE. There! [*She descends the ladder.*]  
Thanks.

ERNEST. What was the matter?

JACQUELINE. I can hardly explain — I thought it was so easy to deceive my husband. Well, it isn't.

ERNEST. . . . We must proceed methodically. Now let's have a bite of supper.

JACQUELINE. Yes, let's!

ERNEST. [*Leading her to the table.*] . . . Now . . .

JACQUELINE. Yes, let's have supper.

ERNEST. Ah, Jacqueline! — Some pâté?

JACQUELINE. Thanks, thanks — I'm not hungry. But I'm so thirsty — give me some Champagne — lots of Champagne!

ERNEST. Yes, let's drink Champagne!

JACQUELINE. This dinner is charming!

ERNEST. Supper! Supper! We must have these often, you know —

JACQUELINE. Very often.

ERNEST. Then we'll meet during the day.

JACQUELINE. And have long walks.

ERNEST. Go to amusing places —

JACQUELINE. Yes!

ERNEST. Yes — visit all the museums.

JACQUELINE. All the museums!

ERNEST. All the museums. It will be capital, eh? Champagne?

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JACQUELINE. Yes, let's drink Champagne!

ERNEST. Let's.

JACQUELINE. . . . Now, say nice things to me — gay things —

ERNEST. Oh, yes: I love you.

JACQUELINE. No, no — that's not gay. . . . Tell me about your adventures — your conquests? You've had some?

ERNEST. Indeed I have — I should think so! A great many. First, at college —

JACQUELINE. Then? After?

ERNEST. After, of course.

JACQUELINE. Have many women been in love with you?

ERNEST. I should think so!

JACQUELINE. Have you any little souvenirs, keepsakes?

ERNEST. [*Embarrassed.*] Well, I —

JACQUELINE. You haven't —?

ERNEST. Oh yes, I have.

JACQUELINE. Show them to me, it'll be so amusing!

ERNEST. If you like. See, this file is full of them. [*He looks at the inscription on a letter-file, then brings the file from the cabinet.*] Here is my past — relics —

JACQUELINE. . . . Oh, what a lot of letters!

ERNEST. Yes, full of tenderness — here is an old bouquet — that blonde was divine! — met her on the beach at a fashionable watering-place.

JACQUELINE. . . . And that menu?

ERNEST. Chic lunch at the Café Anglais — charming comédienne, she was. . . . See this ribbon? . . . Just think —

JACQUELINE. [*Laughing.*] That's enough, I don't want you to be indiscreet. Ernest, I want to drink to your earlier love affairs. . . . Now I'll tell you something: I'm not at all respectable. I'm not a bit afraid of you



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now! [*He takes her in his arms, but the moment his face approaches hers, she is seized with sudden fright, and slaps him.*]

ERNEST. [*Retreating a step or two.*] Oh!

JACQUELINE. . . . I didn't mean to. . . . This is awful! I can certainly feel the effect of the Champagne, but I'm still respectable — I'm hopeless —!

ERNEST. And I don't know what to do!

JACQUELINE. What do you mean?

ERNEST. I mean, I mean — I've proceeded according to every known method: kindness, persuasion, tenderness — my method was irreproachable — well, there remains force. . . .

JACQUELINE. Ernest! . . . [*He goes quickly to her, when the bell rings.*]

They are interrupted; Jacqueline's friends "save" her, and take her home. Just before she leaves, the couple are left alone together for a moment, and Ernest sees that he has been the victim of a little conspiracy. He then tells Jacqueline the truth about his "affairs."

JACQUELINE. My dear friend, how can I thank you?

ERNEST. Give me that rose. [*She takes a rose from her corsage and gives it to him.*] Thank you! See, I'm going to put it in the file, there, with the relics —

JACQUELINE. What, the souvenir of this deception, along with those that recall so many happy memories?

ERNEST. Oh, no! I can tell you now — it's not true what I told you —

JACQUELINE. But all those letters —?

ERNEST. Those letters? Take any one and read it —

JACQUELINE. [*Reading.*] "Dear Monsieur: Never!" — [*Reading another.*] "Excuse me for not coming yesterday" — [*Reading a third.*] "Sorry, but can't come to-morrow" —

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ERNEST. They never came!

JACQUELINE. And you keep these?

ERNEST. What can I do? I keep what I get!

JACQUELINE. And — those other relics?

ERNEST. The others? That bouquet I wore myself when I went to see a lady who would never consent to receive me. The menu from the Café Anglais — I ate alone that day, with an empty chair facing me. That's all! Lost happiness! So you see, Jacqueline, your rose will be quite at home. It will be the saddest of my memories, but not the least beautiful. [*He closes the cabinet, after replacing the file.*]

JACQUELINE. [*Giving him her hand.*] Ah! [*Tenderly.*] How I *might* have loved you — if I had! My dear, dear friend! [*She goes out slowly, without looking at him.*]

ERNEST. Voilà! — I got into the train, but it never left the station — I went to the theater, but there was no performance — now — I'm all alone —

But faithful little Sophie, the piano-teacher who had loved him all along, and whom he had unconsciously adored, it appears, now comes to him, and everything turns out happily.

*L'Eventail*, M. de Caillavet confessed, was his favorite among all the Flers-Caillavet plays. *L'Eventail* contains the best-rounded and most detailed character study which has yet come from these delightful writers;<sup>1</sup> perhaps this explains their preference for it.

Giselle Vaudreuil is a born coquette. “In time of danger,” she says, “a man ought to be brave, a woman beautiful — that is *our* courage!” For

<sup>1</sup> This was written before the production of *Monsieur Bretonneau*, in the Spring of 1914, of which M. de Flers wrote in the *Figaro* that it was the authors' favorite.

years she has succeeded in life by the exercise of her charm; she attains every end by cultivating the art of capturing men — and then passing on to the next. She once did this to François Trévoux, who so took to heart her cruelty that his character was definitely fixed into a misanthropic mold. One day he learns that his friends, Jacques and Germaine de Landève, have invited an old friend of their youth to visit them; the old friend is of course Giselle. François, afraid to meet the woman who had jilted him six years previously, pleads urgent business and attempts to escape to Paris early on the very morning when Giselle is to arrive. But fate and the ingenious devices of the dramatists cause the automobile to break down, and force François to meet his old sweetheart. Complications ensue as Giselle is drawn into a number of intrigues — other people's love-affairs. François vainly struggles against the re-birth of his passion for Giselle, and feels that he is playing a losing game, in spite of the fact that he knows she is an incurable coquette. Her fan — the symbol of her coquetry — bears her on to victory as she brings back erring husbands to misunderstood wives. But she too, at last, feels herself drawn toward the long-suffering man she once wronged. At last François, unable to bear the torture of her presence, makes up his mind to leave:

FRANÇOIS. I have come to say good-by — I'm going, *this time* —

GISELLE. No, François, you are not going — at least, not alone. My friends, I present to you my fiancé.

FRANÇOIS. No, don't believe her. I thank you, Madame, but I cannot accept charity!

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JACQUES. You see!

GISELLE. Very well. But I wish Jacques to know the whole truth, and I don't think Monsieur Trévoux will deny it: I present you to my lover!

FRANÇOIS. Giselle!

GISELLE. Yes, yes! I humbly confess it. [*She looks at François.*] I tried so hard to struggle against love, but it was stronger than I — I am happy to acknowledge my defeat. . . . François, a conquered soldier breaks his sword before giving it up to his victor. [*She breaks her fan.*] Here is mine! . . . I give it to my husband. I shall never have another fan — I promise that.

FRANÇOIS. I don't know what to say — I'm so happy —! Well, now that *I'm* the master, just you see how I'll obey —

GISELLE. My dearest —

PIERRE. [*Bringing forward a package.*] This just arrived from Paris for Madame Vaudreuil.

GISELLE. Oh, yes — I know what it is.

GERMAINE. What?

GISELLE. A fan.

FRANÇOIS. Already?

And the curtain falls, not on a pleasantly false sentimental All's Well, but with a true ring: we know Giselle will carry the fan to her grave.

Our authors have won their greatest successes of late in the field of satire. Three of their finest works are political farces: *Le Bois sacré*, *Le Roi*, and *L'Habit vert*. The first — known in the United States in an adaptation under the title of *Decorating Clementine* — ridicules the craze for "decorations" in France; it is of more local interest than the two works which followed it.

*Le Roi* is the most uproarious of the Flers-Caillavet satires. Imagine, they tell us, the land

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of the *Marseillaise* turned topsy-turvy by the arrival of a royal personage! Imagine that personage a boulevardier among boulevardiers — King Manoel of Portugal must have been the original — picture him shattering the ideals of a staunch Socialist, making love to his wife, and turning the President and his Cabinet into a ridiculous pack of children! Paris is his playground. Received everywhere with acclamations and honor, no wonder he exults and waxes enthusiastic, crying “Que j’aime la France!” It is unjust to reduce to the cold outline here necessary the not at all respectable story of *Le Roi*; I can, however, with impunity transcribe two scenes. Thérèse, Bourdier’s mistress, has received the King in her apartment at a time when her lover — the Socialist leader — is safely out of the way. But he inopportunely, as lovers and husbands in plays will, appears, only to find the King’s hat in the drawing-room. Thérèse comes to Bourdier and tries to explain.

BOURDIER. The name of that man, that —? I must know! [ . . . *The King appears, smiling complacently.*]

THÉRÈSE. [*Introducing the two men.*] His Majesty the King of Ardagne — Monsieur Bourdier, a friend of mine.

BOURDIER. [*Astonished.*] Ah! [*There is a moment’s embarrassment.*]

THE KING. How are you?

BOURDIER. [*Furiously.*] Sire!

THÉRÈSE. Do you know what His Majesty condescended to say the moment you arrived? Well, he expressed a desire to make your acquaintance.

BOURDIER. [*Softening.*] Sire!

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THE KING. Yes, I was looking forward to that privilege. In what way can I be of service to you, my dear Bourdier?

BOURDIER. [*Diminuendo.*] Sire!

THÉRÈSE. His Majesty was kind enough to think of allowing you to invite him to a grand hunt and dinner party at your Château at Gourville.

BOURDIER. [*Almost meekly.*] Sire!

THÉRÈSE. And further: His Majesty, who has only one more day to dispose of . . . offers you all of next Sunday, the day he originally intended to spend with the Marquis de Charnarande.

BOURDIER. [*Bowing, vastly pleased.*] Sire!

THE KING. Don't thank me! Don't! — And now, good-by — till Sunday! I shall be most pleased to see you then. Don't come to the door — I couldn't think of letting you —! Good-by, dear old Bourdier!

BOURDIER. Sire. [*The King extends his hand to Bourdier; Bourdier hesitates, not knowing whether to kiss it or shake it.*]

THE KING. Shake! One doesn't shake kings' hands — in private!

THÉRÈSE. Sire — pardon him. Monsieur Bourdier isn't well acquainted with the forms — he is a Socialist —

THE KING. So am I!

The next act is at the Château on the following Sunday. The King continues to make love to Thérèse. He has added to his conquests, meantime, Bourdier's own wife, Marthe, and is most assiduous. The act closes with the King's very amusing double-meaning compliment: "Oh, how I love France!" In the final act Marthe induces the King to sign a treaty which the country has for some time, without success, been trying to make. Marthe and the King are together:



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THE KING. . . . Here!

MARTHE. What is it?

THE KING. A worthy souvenir — a great present. Do you recognize this document?

MARTHE. No.

THE KING. The famous commerce treaty which I have up to this moment refused to sign, because it is not particularly advantageous to my brother the King of Moldavie. It is worth some millions to your country. For Youyou's sake [*Marthe's pet name before she was married*] I make a present of this to France.

MARTHE. What!

THE KING. Come here. [*He sits down.*] Take my big hand in yours, darling, and make me sign my name.

MARTHE. I don't dare.

THE KING. It is my wish.

MARTHE. [*Obeying.*] J-E-A-N— Shall I put your number down after the name?

THE KING. No number. [*He hands her the document.*] Here's your present. Now you're down in history.

MARTHE. Oh, I'm all trembling. I can't thank you! It would be ridiculous —

Bourdier comes in together with the President of the Republic. The King shows the latter the signed treaty.

THE KING. . . . Here, Monsieur le Président.

THE PRESIDENT. [*Looking at the treaty.*] Oh! [*He passes it to Bourdier.*]

BOURDIER. Ah! . . .

THE KING. Messieurs, dear Bourdier here is giving you a splendid example. He has shown you how, in your democratic country, a man can by his own merit, rise to be of the greatest service to the state.

BOURDIER. Yes, Sire; nowadays, we are the State!

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THE KING. Good! [*The hunting horns are heard in the distance.*] The hunt, Messieurs!

The daring of the plot, the breezy, ample, *esprit gaulois* are far enough from the quiet sentiment of *L'Amour veille* and *L'Eventail*. The authors have entered a new field, in which they are destined to remain the masters, and win further laurels. The occasional vulgarity of *Le Roi* is perhaps necessary, owing to the theme. To Anglo-Saxon minds there appears no excuse for many scenes in which sensuality per se is exploited for purely comic effect. Yet the animal spirits of *Le Roi* give way in the next play, *L'Habit vert*, to rollicking farce and boisterousness, which seem almost out of place in a Flers and Caillavet play. Yet here again so funny is the situation and so clever the dialogue that we are forced to accept the whole as a huge joke. The American woman who makes quite unprintable "breaks," and whose affairs might well scandalize a newspaper reporter, is in spite of everything one of the most amusing figures in contemporary comedy.

*L'Habit vert* is a satire on the great and august Academy — of which the two marquises' are not yet members. The Count Hubert de Latour-Latour accidentally finds himself at the château of the Duke and Duchess de Maulévrier. The Duchess, an American, is at once attracted to the young noble.

HUBERT. Ah, Madame la duchesse, thank you! You have a great heart.

DUCHESS. Yes, I have a great heart — also a great park. I walk in it every day. . . . This evening I shall be

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there, after dinner. Come to the end of the long alley — we'll converse about the poetry of love, sitting on a clematis-covered bench.

HUBERT. Oh, Madame la duchesse, what an honor — and what a joy! . . .

DUCHESS. Hush, here comes my husband the Duke! [*Enter the Duke.*] Dearest, I should like to introduce Monsieur le comte Hubert de Latour —

DUKE. [*Bowing coldly.*] I am very well!

HUBERT. [*Aside to the Duchess.*] Latour-Latour —

DUCHESS. That's what I said —

HUBERT. No, twice!

DUCHESS. Oh yes, double! Monsieur le comte de Latour-Latour —

DUKE. [*Smiling.*] That is very different. Delighted, I am sure, to make your acquaintance. I know of your family.

Later, Hubert begins to make love to the Duchess. He takes her hand in his and kneels at her feet. Then the Duke surprises them. With the Duke is Brigitte, the stenographer who is helping Hubert with his book on his ancestors.

DUKE. Oh!

DUCHESS and HUBERT. Oh!

BRIGITTE. Oh!

HUBERT. [*Quickly rising.*] Monsieur le duc! How are you?

DUKE. [*Violently.*] Not well, Monsieur! As for you, Madame, will you kindly tell me what was the significance of that indecent posture you were in when I entered?

DUCHESS. [*Speaking English.*] Oh, I can't answer. . . . I'm awfully frightened. You have such a voice and such a face! What a dreadful thing! This man seems

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to be quite out of temper. Oh, dear me, dear me, dear me —

HUBERT. I hope, Monsieur le duc, that this explanation will suffice?

DUKE. [*Exasperated.*] No, Monsieur: I don't understand English.

HUBERT. [*With dignity.*] Neither do I.

DUKE. [*With a menace.*] Then, Monsieur —!

BRIGITTE. [*Stepping between the men.*] Let me translate, Monsieur le duc!

DUKE. Proceed!

BRIGITTE. . . . When you came in, Monsieur le duc, Monsieur le comte de Latour-Latour was at the feet of Madame la duchesse — you know, he *was* at her feet, wasn't he?

DUKE. Of course! And then? Then?

BRIGITTE. Then? He was begging her for something. That was evident, was it not?

DUKE. Of course, but for what?

BRIGITTE. It was to ask you —

DUKE. For what?

BRIGITTE. [*Still hesitating.*] That you propose him as a candidate —

DUKE. For what?

BRIGITTE. For the French Academy!

DUKE. For the French Academy!

DUCHESS. [*Astonished.*] The French Academy?

DUKE. Is that true?

HUBERT. [*Looking at the Duchess, who is dumbly supplicating him to say yes.*] It is.

DUKE. [*Bowing.*] Why not say so at once?

DUCHESS. Because you came in so abruptly that I was frozen with fear! Oh!

DUKE. [*To the Duchess.*] Pardon me, dear, but really, when I saw a man at your feet, I —

HUBERT. [*With an air of nobility.*] I can readily

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understand your surprise, Monsieur le duc; I sympathize with it. But I come of a family no member of which during eight hundred years ever asked a favor of a lady without kneeling to her for it.

DUKE. Well spoken, Monsieur! For ten centuries my own family has ever been ready with the bended knee: habit acquired from constant prayer, doubtless. Give me your hand!

HUBERT. Willingly.

Hubert must now in honor bound present himself for election to the French Academy. But he rightly feels that he has no business there, and he has no desire to be elected. "But," says the Duke, "everything marks you out as the ideal Academician: your preoccupation with good solid ideas, your obscurity, the insignificance of your literary work, your rather melancholy disposition —"

The third act is very daring: the scene is laid beneath the sacred Cupola in the Institute, where the Immortals congregate, and the stage represents the Amphitheater. It is the day on which Hubert, elected by an overwhelming majority, is to make the Discourse on his Reception and the Duke his reply to Hubert. The Duchess is deeply concerned over the ceremony, because she has somewhere mislaid a rather compromising letter to Hubert. The séance begins, Hubert makes his speech, and the Duke rises to make his "Reply":

DUKE. Monsieur — after heartily joining in the demonstrations of approval which greeted your Address, I am happy to remark that this occasion is a particularly gratifying one for me; it is a day which stands out among

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all others. And how could it be otherwise, Monsieur? For the feeling of friendship in my bosom is so well in accord with the similar sentiment of esteem in which I hold you! My thoughts are drawn toward the various affectionate bonds which unite us. I am urged to quote what Epictetus said to his favorite disciple: "My loving dearie Hubert —"!

[*He has turned a page, and finds between his hands a large sheet of blue paper. With great dignity and emphasis he repeats: "My loving dearie Hubert." The audience rises in confusion. The Duke lays down his manuscript, and passes his hand over his forehead. . . .*]

DUCHESS. My letter!

The audience is dismissed and the ceremony postponed. But the possibility of a public scandal is so terrible to contemplate, that the Duke is persuaded to resume the séance and save the day. The audience is recalled, and the Duke's Discourse recommenced:

. . . as Epictetus said to one of his favorite disciples: "You are indeed favored of the gods, loved son of the Muses! You are indeed a happy man! My hand will crown you with flowers! [*As he continues, the curtain falls.*]

The last act — rather an anticlimax — straightens matters out: Hubert is married off to Brigitte, the faithful sweetheart, just as Ernest was to the little music teacher in *L'Amour veille*.

This summary of the principal plays of Flers and Caillavet could scarcely be other than the faintest approximation to the vividness with which these two paint their characters and round out



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their ingenious and invariably amusing situations. Geniality, light-hearted satire, impudence, *insouciance*, are their gifts. Flers and Caillavet are to be seen — not analyzed.

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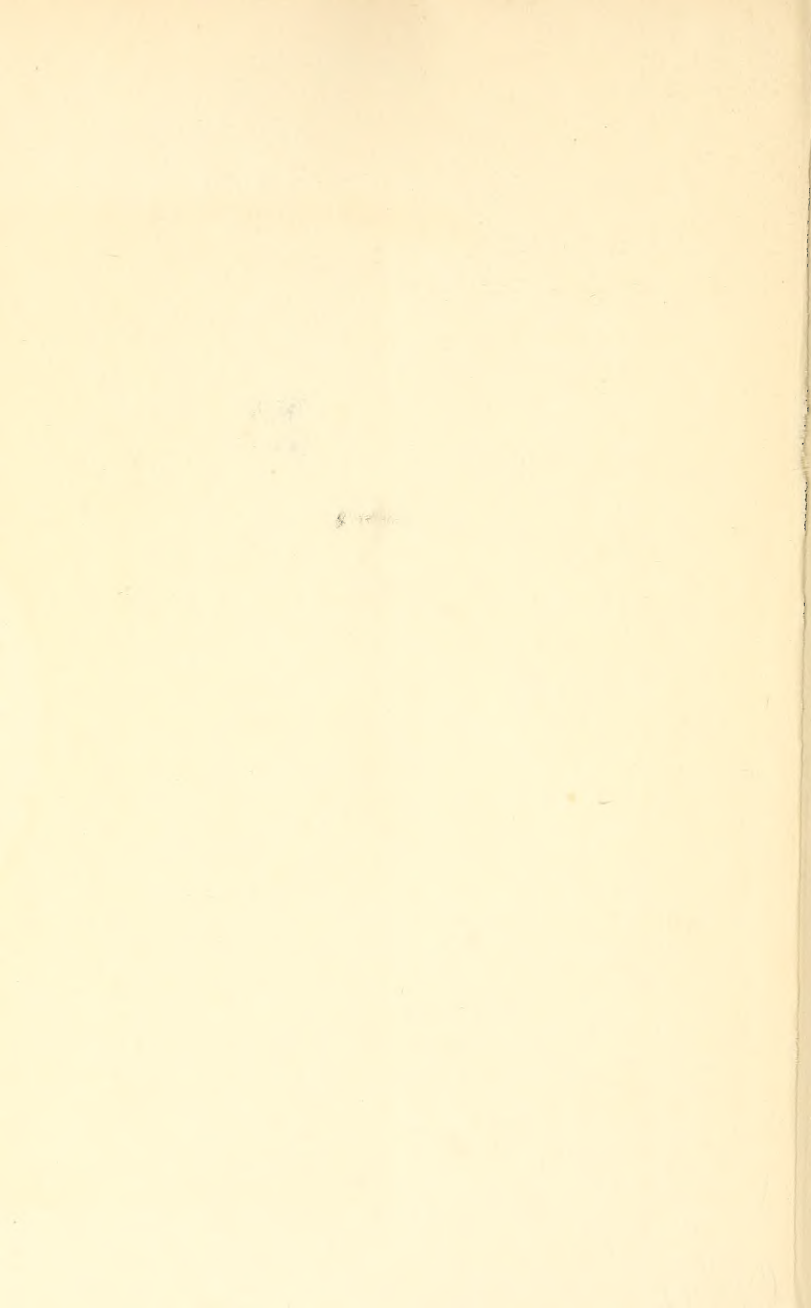












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